The Republican Thought of Abigail Adams

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Contents

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And finally, I would like to recognize Abigail Adams. She sacrificed her life for her family, her country, and her beliefs, and so often feared that the deeds of her generation would go unnoticed and unappreciated by those who inherited the benefits. This project is proof that we remember and we will be forever in her debt.

Introduction

> *"These are times in which a Genious would wish to live. It is not in the still calm of life, or the repose of a pacific station, that great characters are formed… The Habits of a vigorous mind are formed in contending with difficulties…Great necessities call out great virtues. When a mind is raised, and animated by scenes that engage the Heart, then those qualities which would otherways lay dormant, wake into Life, and form the Character of the Hero and the Statesman."*
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> -Abigail Adams to John Quincy Adams, January 19, 1780

Abigail Adams, wife of the second President of the United States and mother of the sixth, imparted this advice to her thirteen-year-old son, but her words also had a universal significance in the second half of the eighteenth century. Knowingly or not, Abigail's description encompassed her own role in the American Revolution and early years of the United States. She was forced into action by political and military conflicts during her life but rose to the challenge and developed "those qualities which would otherways lay dormant" with the utmost pride for her contribution and sacrifice. Although prohibited from becoming a statesman, Abigail exuded heroic qualities in the face of great adversity that are often overlooked or underappreciated in current studies of her time period.

Abigail was surrounded by important political figures for the majority of her life. Her husband John was a Harvard College graduate and practicing lawyer when the

American Revolution broke out. He served in the First and Second Continental Congresses in Philadelphia, playing a major role in the drafting of the Declaration of Independence, and afterward serving as a diplomat in Holland, France and Great Britain. Over the course of a decade in Europe, he negotiated treaties and loans and served as the first American minister to Great Britain following the close of the American Revolution. John drafted the Massachusetts Constitution, which served as the model for the United States Constitution. Soon after his return to Massachusetts, John was elected the nation's first Vice President and served two terms under George Washington. He was also Washington's successor as the second President of the United States for a single term and maintained strong Federalist policies, although he did not officially align himself with any party.

John's and Abigail's eldest son, John Quincy, accompanied his father to Europe at the age of ten and received his education from the Latin School of Amsterdam and Leyden University. He left his father's side to serve as a secretary for fellow diplomat Francis Dana in Russia and traveled throughout much of Europe. He returned home to finish his education at Harvard College and practiced law like his father before him. President Washington appointed John Quincy minister to the Netherlands and he spent another large amount of time in Europe, continuing under his father's presidency as well. Upon his return, John Quincy served in both the Massachusetts and United States Congresses before he was sent to Europe yet again. He later became Secretary of State under James Monroe, followed by his own presidential term. Like his father, John Quincy was an unpopular president, but he remained an active and influential figure in Congress for the remainder of his life.

Aside from family members, Abigail interacted with many educated and influential minds. She maintained a long-running correspondence with Mercy Otis Warren, the highly literate and politically minded sister and wife of fellow Massachusetts patriots. Mercy wrote and published with the support of John Adams, both under her own name and under pseudonyms. Also important is Thomas Jefferson, John's fellow Continental Congress delegate, foreign minister, and successor to the presidency. Jefferson headed the Democratic-Republican Party in opposition to the Federalist Adamses. Despite strong political differences, Jefferson maintained a rich correspondence with John and Abigail with a relatively short falling out during his own presidency.

Surrounded by so many prominent figures, it is not surprising that we recognize the name "Abigail Adams." Most people, however, associate Abigail with her famous family and friends, yet know little about the woman herself. Historians and scholars might know more about the details of her life, but is Abigail only remembered because she left behind such a rich correspondence? Numerous biographies have been written about Abigail in the nearly two centuries since her death, but what makes her worth remembering? What makes her worth further study?

The vast amount of letters Abigail Adams left behind gives particular insight into the lives of eighteenth-century women. Living during momentous events in the early history of the United States, she provides an account of how the war affected the lives of those left at home. She also exchanged information with and about the men in her life that portrayed their personal feelings, beliefs and justifications in a manner not readily available to the contemporary public. But more particularly, the letters reveal details of

Abigail's life and personality and also hint at how and why she became such a remarkable historical figure in an era in which women rarely stood out.

Abigail corresponded with a wide variety of people throughout her life. The major sources for this project are her letters to and from her husband, sisters, children, family friends, and major political figures. Abigail did not keep a diary and some of her letters were likely destroyed by her grandson, Charles Francis Adams. The vast majority of Abigail's correspondence is preserved in the Adams Papers collection at the Massachusetts Historical Society (MHS) in Boston. The *Adams Family Correspondence* series, including personal letters of several generations of the Adams Family, has as yet been published through the year 1787, just before Abigail and John returned home from the latter's diplomatic missions in Europe. Almost all of the letters written between John and Abigail throughout their more than five decades together have recently been compiled as part of an online database through the MHS entitled *Adams Family Papers: An Electronic Archive*, which can be found at http://www.masshist.org/digitaladams. Approximately two hundred letters written from Abigail to her older sister, Mary Cranch, are housed at the American Antiquarian Society in Worcester, Massachusetts, many of which have been published in *New Letters of Abigail Adams*. In addition, *The Adams-Jefferson Letters: The Complete Correspondence between Thomas Jefferson and Abigail and John Adams* contains all the letters written between Jefferson and Abigail over a course of more than a decade.

This project is not a biography. Rather, it is an analysis of the development of the republican ideals of a woman caught up in the middle of the revolutionary period. Abigail did not choose to live through such an epic conflict, yet she embraced the

challenge and wholeheartedly believed it was the best course of action for her fellow Christians and Americans. The circumstances in which Abigail was forced to live for years without her husband both tested her resilience and paved the path for her own intellectual stimulation. It was this very separation that initiated Abigail's discussions with an informed political leader who welcomed her opinions. A chronological analysis of Abigail's letters brings to light the changes in the types of issues she addressed (often based on their immediate importance in her life), how much of her personal views she was willing to unveil, how she conversed with different people, her motives for initiating and terminating correspondences, and the development of her views in relation to important political events. Her transition from young bride of a lawyer to confidant of revolutionaries and presidents can be traced through her letters. Abigail's upbringing, connection to leading political figures, and her own personal attention to the affairs and interests of her peers culminated in the formation of a unique woman who both fulfilled her duties and took advantage of her opportunities. She came to embody the very principles of republicanism upon which the nation was founded and she helped prepare her son for the transition of leadership once it came time for the next generation to carry on their ideals.

The existing scholarship on Abigail Adams tends to focus on the events and people in her life, rather than on Abigail herself. She is seen as a secondary character and is represented in such a manner. When Charles Francis Adams first published Abigail's letters in 1840, he freely censored the information he felt would taint his grandmother's reputation as a respectable, moral woman.[1] He molded Abigail's image to suit his own

[1] Edith B. Gelles, *Portia: The World of Abigail Adams* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992), 1. See note 2.

purposes, regardless of what she really had to say, with the intention of presenting his family in the best light. Several Abigail biographies from the first half of the twentieth century are closer to accounts (the word "account" is literal, as some of these were little more than storytelling) of John's life and actions, such is the case with Dorothie Bobbé's 1929 *Abigail Adams: The Second First Lady*: "No study of Abigail Adams' life can fail to bring to the student the clearest possible picture of her husband, and no clear picture of John Adams can fail to show him a man of great vision, a great statesman, and a figure in our history to whom his full share of honor has never yet been paid."[2] The reason Abigail was considered important was because of who she married.

As historian Edith B. Gelles describes, Abigail's representation has shifted focus based on more widespread women's scholarship throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. From domestic to dutiful to political to feminist, most of these representations cover only one or two facets of Abigail's character and never get at the heart of who she was.[3] Rosemary Keller's *Patriotism and the Female Sex: Abigail Adams and the American Revolution*, written in 1977, analyzes the religious influences behind Abigail's political theory and her influence on John.[4] While both are important aspects of Abigail's life, the domestic realm is neglected. Gelles's own study, entitled *Portia: The World of Abigail Adams*, focuses on Abigail's relationships thematically, rather than chronologically. Even though Gelles addresses the problem of viewing Abigail only in reference to the men of her life, the author still frames her work on Abigail's interaction with other people. In a way, this undermines Abigail's character, neglecting to give her

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[2] Dorothie Bobbé, *Abigail Adams: The Second First Lady* (New York: J. J. Little and Ives Company, 1929), 294.
[3] Gelles, *Portia*, 2.
[4] Rosemary Keller, *Patriotism and the Female Sex: Abigail Adams and the American Revolution* (Brooklyn, NY: Carlson Publishing Inc, 1994.

credit in her own right. Betsy Erkkila's article, "Revolutionary Women," presents Abigail in an overly radical light and essentially ignores the fact that Abigail consciously remained within the female sphere. Erkkila maintains that "the writing woman was still an anomaly," but this is difficult to apply to Abigail, who only wrote letters (a very common activity for women at the time) and was not publishing literature.[5] The author's attempt to illustrate the affects of the Revolution on women, the backlash and retreat from radicalism experienced by the men, and the ultimate foundation for future women's movements is informative but sometimes at the cost of contextual accuracy.

Several works have also been written about the lives of women in general during the revolutionary period. Linda K. Kerber's *Women of the Republic: Intellect and Ideology in Revolutionary America* centers upon the thoughts and ideas women developed during and because of their exposure to the revolution.[6] Kerber coined the innovative term "Republican Motherhood," an unofficial institution in which women's private lives intersected with politics through their roles in raising civic-minded sons. Although women gaining an active political role rather than a periphery function was something most men and women of the late eighteenth century were not willing to advocate, in reality women's involvement in the Revolution opened the door to a greater appreciation of women's capabilities both inside and outside the home and paved the way for the women's movements of the mid-1800s.

Mary Beth Norton's *Liberty's Daughters: The Revolutionary Experience of American Women* focuses on the broader social implications of independence and

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[5] Betsy Erkkila, "Revolutionary Women," *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature*, 6:2 (Autumn, 1987): 190.
[6] Linda B. Kerber, *Women of the Republic: Intellect and Ideology in Revolutionary America* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1980).

republican rhetoric.[7] She asserts that the majority of women were not uplifted and praised for their contributions in colonial America, but rather both men and women maintained the general belief that women remained second to their husbands and functional only in a domestic sense. A widely patriarchal and polarized society characterized this time period, maintains Norton, and men treated women with little respect. Norton asserts that women experienced significant changes following their participation in the Revolution. This greater control over personal choices such as when and who to marry still did not change the fact that women remained in the feminine sphere.

Carol Berkin's *Revolutionary Mothers: Women in the Struggle for America's Independence* describes the tangible ways in which women participated in the revolution, including unrepresented female groups such as Loyalists, African slaves and Native Americans.[8] While she writes to a general audience outside the academic world, Berkin raises the difficult issues of how slavery complicated the idea of freedom and the precarious views contemporaries held of women who were directly involved on the warfront, such as wives who followed the armies. Berkin concludes that Republican Motherhood was problematic because, by making motherhood the most important civic duty for a woman, she was once again constrained to the domestic sphere. The author attributes the general retreat from politics following the war to the focus on rebuilding all that had been destroyed, but reminds the reader that the impact of the Revolution for women was revisited soon after at the Seneca Falls Convention in 1848. Each of these

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[7] Mary Beth Norton, *Liberty's Daughters: The Revolutionary Experience of American Women, 1750-1800* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1980).
[8] Carol Berkin, *Revolutionary Mothers: Women in the Struggle for America's Independence* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf: 2005).

studies is an excellent synthesis of different aspects of late eighteenth-century women's lives and the implications of the Revolution on post-war social developments. These resources are valuable in understanding one woman's life in relation to her greater society and also provide insight into just how she functioned and why she was unique within that environment.

In a broader context, the general ideology of the American Revolution also proves useful in situating women in the conflict. In order to understand the importance of women's roles, one must know what men were doing as well. As its title suggests, Bernard Bailyn's *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution* focuses on the ideological developments that became so important to Americans that they were willing to sacrifice their lives in support of those beliefs.[9] By examining the origins of what became "republican virtue," Bailyn illustrates how republican ideals penetrated both the political and personal arenas. The political transformations that took place, as Gordon S. Wood analyzes in his work, *The Creation of the American Republic, 1776-1787*, were limited to the realm of men. This is not to say that women were not affected nor that they bore no influence: they were just unable to be active, open participants.

Gordon's study addresses the exact nature of "republicanism." First and foremost, Republicanism is a form of government in which a representative body, elected from the pool of virtuous elite men, rules in the interest of the common population. According to Gordon, however, "Republicanism meant more for Americans than simply the elimination of a king and the institution of an elective system. It added a moral dimension, a utopian depth, to the political separation from England—a depth that

[9] Bernard Bailyn, *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1967).

involved the very character of their society."[10] Republicanism was both a justification for independence and an outline for the future of the country. Early Americans found value in duty and honor in both the public and private spheres. Maintaining order, Wood asserts, was placed in the hands of the masses and required "public virtue" so as to prevent downright chaos. This reliance on the people for stability made the republican founders stress the importance of acting for the good of the whole rather than for personal gain, even at the cost of self-sacrifice.

Republicanism did not call for drastic changes for women. Wood illustrates that republicanism "stressed equality of opportunity" and, simultaneously, the "equality of condition." These concepts conflicted since unlimited capitalistic opportunity—regulated only by personal virtue—allowed for social stratification. Gordon refrains from taking the issue further to address women. If only merit counted, were women not theoretically capable of achieving the same social statuses as men? In many cases, such as that of widow and successful merchant Elizabeth Murray, women *were* able to achieve economic independence. Too much direct involvement in traditionally male activities, however, often led these women to be social outcasts and labeled "masculine."[11] Instead, most women participated in what Kerber calls "Republican Motherhood": women applied republican ideologies to their own familiar domestic sphere. Duty to one's country was fulfilled by maintaining the household while men were away, upholding the nonconsumption legislation that men created, and indoctrinating children with the same principles upon which the nation was founded. Women were exposed to the political

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[10] Gordon S. Wood, *The Creation of the American Republic, 1776-1787* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1969), 47.
[11] Patricia Cleary, *Elizabeth Murray: A Woman's Pursuit of Independence in Eighteenth-Century America* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 2000), 2.

world but they generally only observed and commented in private. Their political contribution was through their husbands and sons, and this was an honorable calling for women of the republic.

This project will follow a chronological layout. Within each chapter, however, many concepts are covered thematically in order to maintain a coherent argument. Chapter One details Abigail Adams's family background and the beginning of her relationship with John Adams. Understanding how Abigail was raised and her personality at the beginning of her marriage provides a standard by which to compare the development of her republican ideals in relation to her experiences during and post-Revolution. Chapter Two delves into the beginning of John's political career and Abigail's first direct exposure to political developments and theory. It is in this first period of separation that John and Abigail conducted discussions by which Abigail first found a voice for her opinions and began to learn about the world outside of Braintree, Massachusetts. She also took the reins of the family farm and dealt with economic demands in her husband's absence. This chapter is divided into two main sections, one for each of the Continental Congresses in which John participated.

In Chapter Three, the even greater burden of overseas missions strained the Adamses' marriage more than ever before. Abigail once again was forced to assume John's traditional role in the family, but this time was more or less unsupervised by her husband through letters. John's appearance on the international stage likewise exposed Abigail to politics not only in the United States, but also throughout much of Europe. She even took her first step out of her country and made the trip to Europe to join her husband, throwing herself straight into the heart of French and British extravagance and

politics. This chapter is divided into three chronological sections, covering John's first mission to France, his second mission to Britain and the Netherlands, and Abigail's journey to Europe. The final chapter will cover Abigail's republican developments through John's vice presidencies and presidency. Her exposure to the leading figures of America, in a way, affected her more than those of Europe. It was this atmosphere in which Abigail was most intensely tested between her political interests and opinions, and her role as supportive wife on the public stage. In the Epilogue, I will analyze an exceptional event, which served as the culmination of Abigail's sixty years of unique life experiences. How can we understand Abigail's confrontation of the sitting President in the context of the preceding four chapters? This project will illustrate how the belief and execution of republican ideals and virtues developed through some of the United States' most important events brought Abigail Adams to embody the principles of the struggle for which she devoted her entire life.

Although some dictionaries had been published, spelling was not widely standardized in the late eighteenth century. The original spelling and capitalization have been reproduced in this project, except in cases where the author's meaning was ambiguous.

Chapter One

"[T]oo much pride to be a clog to any body"[1]: The Makings of a Proper Eighteenth-Century Wife, 1744-1774

American life during the eighteenth century was organized by specifically prescribed structures and conventions. Hierarchical rule pervaded all aspects of pre-Revolutionary society. Households designed as individual patriarchies reflected the larger monarchical rule of Great Britain and her colonies. In the ideal, men managed the family's link to the public world while women carried out the tasks of everyday domestic life and remained solely in the private sphere. Honor for a man involved serving in public office—civic or religious—and participating in the town's activities. Women, on the other hand, had no political voice. Instead they held day-to-day life together while the men worked outside of the home. The wife's role has been described as "complementary and at the same time secondary to that of her husband." Most women strove to fit into their prescribed roles rather than be outcasts by flouting societal

[1] Abigail Smith to John Adams, September 12, 1763, *The Adams Papers:Adams Family Correspondence*, ed. L.H. Butterfield et al., 4 vols. (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 1963, 1973), I, 9. Cited hereafter *AFC*. In correspondence following her marriage to John Adams, Abigail Adams will be abbbreviated AA instead of AS.

standards.[2] Most women regarded these gender divisions as neither offensive nor demeaning; instead, women took pride in successfully performing their duties as supportive companions.

To state that women were largely restricted to the private sphere is not to imply that they did not interact with the outside world; rather, women developed a rich culture and satisfied their desire for community with other women. Women often visited one another to work or to exchange local gossip and facilitate sometimes life-long companionship. These visits also provided a break from the daily routine. In addition to visiting, letter-writing was a fashionable undertaking for girls starting at an early age. Written correspondence between female relatives and close friends sometimes revealed private sentiments that wives were not willing to share with their own husbands.[3] The pressure to convey the appearance of a proficient wife and mother sometimes outweighed personal happiness. Women took solace and derived comfort from others who shared their experiences.

Women in rural areas often contributed economically to the household. When manufactured domestic goods were not easily accessible, women made and sold their own.[4] Women engaged in petty trade and constant exchange with the materials they had and the services they could provide their neighbors. Possession of specific crops or specialized skills allowed women to trade for other necessities that they could not provide for themselves.[5] Spinning and weaving were some of the most important and symbolic

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[2] Norton, *Liberty's Daughters*, 3; Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, *Good Wives: Image and Reality in the Lives of Women in Northern New England, 1650-1750* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1982), 8.
[3] Norton, *Liberty's Daughters*, 14-15.
[4] Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, *A Midwife's Tale: The Life of Martha Ballard, Based on Her Diary, 1785-1812* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1990), 77, 79.
[5] Ulrich, *Good Wives*, 26, 48.

tasks of rural femininity and were later more widely adopted—both out of revolutionary spirit and practical necessity—during periods of non-importation. Sometimes women combined social and economic aspects of their lives, as was the case with "spinning frolics" in the rural South.[6] These involved young girls gathering together and performing their work while experiencing a sense of community. Arduous tasks were more pleasant to deal with when girls could interact with and support one another. Women who lived on farms and did not have the support of servants or slaves often assumed responsibility for many more chores than their urban counterparts. In addition to raising the children and taking care of their husbands, rural women often had to cook on a daily basis, wash the laundry and clean the house, tend to the livestock and garden, and prepare food for the winter.[7] The onerous tasks associated with daily survival placed a heavy burden on women in order to free up time for the men to pursue life in the public sphere.

The definition of women as helpmates to their husbands allowed for a flexibility of gender roles that sometimes appeared on the surface to take women out of their private spheres. Women were stripped of their legal identities once they married and were defined solely in terms of their husbands. In certain cases, however, a woman was allowed to execute legal actions in the name of her husband if he was absent or otherwise unable to do so himself. It is important to note that she was only allowed to use the legal power of her husband in his name and retained no power for herself. Similarly, a woman could not own property or enter into legally binding contracts without the backing of her

[6] Norton, *Liberty's Daughters*, 15, 17.
[7] Ibid., 9-12.

husband or other male relative.[8] Married women were largely disconnected from the legal and financial aspects of their lives but were able to occasionally transcend societal dictates when either supported or obliged by their husbands.

Additionally, women occasionally were forced to help perform tasks at home that were generally reserved for men. These tasks included supervising workers and executing business matters. Wives who carried out traditionally male duties were viewed as deputy or surrogate husbands. Instead of being labeled as masculine, these women were justified in temporarily stepping into the male sphere because it was their duty to aid their husbands by any means necessary. Eighteenth-century women would not have viewed this convention as an opportunity for independence, but rather as yet another marital responsibility that they had to shoulder. The malleability inherent in being a deputy husband allowed for a greater range of tasks women had to undertake but fell within the bounds of their dependence upon their husbands. While rigid gender role divisions theoretically prevailed, the realities of life dictated a much more flexible and adaptable relationship. [9]

During the latter half of the eighteenth century, colonial women's lives were affected by the spread of Enlightenment thought and values. Even though many Enlightenment thinkers addressed the roles women played in society, they failed to provide a justification for changing or the means by which to change women's social or political standing.[10] The Enlightenment's stress on human reason theoretically extended to women but leading male thinkers did not conclude that women were equal to men, nor

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[8] Patricia Cleary, *Elizabeth Murray: A Woman's Pursuit of Independence in Eighteenth-Century America* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 2000), 71.
[9] Berkin, *Revolutionary Mothers*, 6, 10-11; Ulrich, *Good Wives*, 36-39.
[10] Kerber, *Women of the Republic*, 27.

that they could fulfill the public functions required of men.[11] Nevertheless, the belief that all humans were rational beings at least allowed for the possibility of female prudence and reflected the contrasting yet coexisting relationship between men and women at the outbreak of the Revolutionary War.

Abigail Smith Adams was as much a woman of her time as she was an exceptional figure in the backdrop of the late eighteenth-century political scene. Born to the fourth generation (on her mother's side) since the arrival of Edmund and Judith Quincy in the Massachusetts Bay colony, Abigail was the descendent of a prominent line of men and women. The first Quincys of North America brought with them a prestigious reputation from England and quickly acquired a large allotment of land. As the closest thing to a landed aristocracy in the Boston area, Quincy men were automatically given public offices once they reached a reasonable age.[12] These positions often required travel throughout the Massachusetts colony. In order to pursue the esteemed public service that Quincy men desired, they sacrificed the careful attention to their estates, to which most contemporary men devoted their lives.

The Quincy women became accustomed to filling in when business took their husbands away from home. The women who married into the Quincy family generally came from similarly well-established backgrounds and likely anticipated coping with a husband whose attention would often be outside of the home.[13] Quincy men left behind evidence in their wills of the faith they had in their wives' abilities to run the household alone. All of the Quincy men preceding Abigail's generation who composed their wills while their wives were still alive named their wives the sole executrixes. It was

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[11] Berkin, *Revolutionary Women*, 4.
[12] Keller, *Patriotism and the Female Sex*, 4-5.
[13] Ibid.

extremely uncommon for men in colonial New England to give women sole control of the estate, which implies that Quincy women "probably had assumed joint responsibilities in administering family financial matters with their husbands."[14] This undermined the standard ideal of women's legal identity being subsumed by their husbands' because Quincy women were acknowledged as self-sufficient. Additionally, these men passed property down to both married and single daughters, rather than solely to adult sons. Quincy men had faith in their wives after having witnessed their competence in both domestic and financial affairs, but they also had faith in their daughters' ability to maintain the family legacy.

Lacking a structured educational system, girls generally learned only what the elder women of their families taught them. Abigail's primary instruction involved the domestic skills she would need to support her future family since that was the most virtuous—and the only respectable—vocation allowed to women at the time. Because of Abigail's family history, however, she was likely also prepared specifically for the life of a wife of a public figure. Abigail was exposed at an early age to the responsibilities of men in public service while her father William Smith served as the Reverend of the First Church of Weymouth. Although holding perhaps a more modest post than some of the Quincy men, Smith often served his community and traveled to others.[15] Abigail stayed at home with her mother and likely helped fill in for her father's absence just as she would her husband's.

Additionally, Abigail's maternal grandfather John Quincy—along with her future husband John Adams—was involved in defending a young minister who preached liberal

[14] Ibid., 13-14.
[15] Ibid., 10

Enlightenment values. Even though Abigail was only a child during the incident, she was undoubtedly raised according to the value system that both her father and grandfather worked so hard to defend. The Enlightenment intermingled with the Puritan tradition of Abigail's family and, while actively participating in the church, they stressed the ability of human reason to influence religious beliefs.[16] It is because of his liberal stance that William Smith maintained such a rich library in his home, filled both with poetry and contemporary writings. Rather than sticking to traditional ideology, he was interested in accepting more modern beliefs. He allowed his daughters to likewise enrich themselves as they pleased.

Even though Abigail was exposed to such an extensive library through her father, it was the influence of her future brother-in-law, Richard Cranch, that sparked her interest in poetry.[17] The literature of the day taught Abigail that her role in society was as a wife and mother but also that women could still be intelligent and deserved spouses that would stimulate their minds. Despite the fact that the role of women was restricted to the private sphere, they were capable of leading fulfilling lives. In the Quincy family, such characteristics were encouraged in women because they were "expected to support their husbands' work and be able to express themselves and their thoughts on public issues."[18] This certainly was not the norm for the common eighteenth-century woman but Quincy women were bred for a very specific lifestyle. The type of man a Quincy woman wanted to marry would be the type of man who would appreciate her for her remarkable qualities

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[16] Ibid., 10-11.

[17] Richard Cranch was an English-born man who was proficient in technical skills and scholarship. Cranch moved from Boston to Braintree in 1750 and befriended John Adams. He moved to Weymouth in 1760 and likely met the Smiths through the town church. Cranch married Mary Smith on November 25, 1762. Richard Cranch to Mary Smith, December 30, 1761, footnoted, *AFC*, I, 1.
Charles W. Akers, *Abigail Adams: An American Woman* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1980), 9-12.

[18] Keller, *Patriotism and the Female Sex*, 16.

and her ability to balance traditional domestic skills with the unique wants and needs of a husband in the public arena.

John Adams was exactly the kind of man Abigail was raised to marry. Even though he came from a strikingly different background, their respective families had interacted a great deal during the past century. John came from a line of men who worked their way up generation after generation from the lowest public offices to the same political status as Quincy men. The ways in which John and Abigail met are telling of how uniquely compatible the couple was. When Abigail was a young girl, John met her while visiting her father in an attempt to advance his legal career. Becoming familiar with a leading figure of a town was a way for John to spread his reputation around the Braintree area and increase the business of his law practice.[19] John's career forced him to travel often and was a good starting point for a future public office; he was following the same pattern as typical Quincy men. Another connection between John and Abigail was their tie with Richard Cranch.[20] John praised Richard and Mary Smith Cranch after their wedding: "I love them better than any Mortals who have no other Title to my Love than Friendship gives."[21] Abigail had developed her fondness for reading and letter-writing from a very close friend of her future husband. In essence, Cranch had helped to shape Abigail into a woman worthy of marriage to John.

The existing letters between John and Abigail during their courtship provide insight into the multiple facets of their relationship that made them so compatible. Their relationship was not founded on economic or social gain: both John's and Abigail's personalities complemented each other in a way that allowed them to be unreserved in

[19] Ibid., 4-8, 28.
[20] Akers, *Abigail Adams,* 13.
[21] JA to AS, February 14, 1763, *AFC*, I, 3.

their flirtations and conversations. In a letter to Mary Smith, John joked that he would be forced to "foment Rebellion" in response to Abigail's claim that she had developed a romantic fondness for the British monarch King George.[22] Long before a legitimate conflict emerged between Great Britain and the American colonies, John made a statement tantamount to treason in his flirtation with Abigail. John and Abigail gave each other pen names that embodied attractive characteristics of one another, as was an affectionate custom often shared by courting couples. As early as 1763, Abigail referred to John by the name of Lysander, a man described during their time as intelligent, respectable, and successful with the support of his wife. These characteristics reflected both John's life and the role Abigail wanted to play in his life. In turn, John referred to Abigail as Diana, the virgin goddess of the hunt. The name Diana certainly implied the chastity valued in a potential wife but also may have been playfully commenting on Abigail's ability to win John's heart.[23]

The major event depicted in the courtship letters was John's smallpox inoculation in Boston during an epidemic in April and May of 1764. The playful nature of the couple was illustrated when John described to Abigail the physical characteristics of a friend of Abigail's that he had met during his stay in Boston. John referred to the woman as a "Buxom Lass" with whom he "longed for a Game of Romps." The juxtaposition of John's physical description of the woman and his desire undoubtedly indicates that he was making a sexual comment. He claimed that the reason he did not act on those desires was that the situation was not appropriate: his inoculation and the way he looked while he was in bed would likely be undesirable to a lady. Instead of taking this statement as a

[22] JA to Mary Smith, December 30, 1761, *AFC*, I, 1.
[23] Keller, *Patriotism and the Female Sex*, 32-33.

sign of infidelity, Abigail sarcastically took the stance of a supportive partner, retorting that John should "follow that amusement which is most agreeable to you whether it be Cards, Chequers, Musick, Writing, or Romping."[24]

Abigail took satisfaction in knowing that she was intelligent enough and knew John well enough to make inferences about him. Abigail addressed the ease at which she could "write to you with so little restraint," claiming that she was virtuous and courageous to be able to do so.[25] The private relationship between John and Abigail allowed for an unreserved honesty that otherwise might have been viewed as immodest for a woman. Even though Abigail cared more about John's judgment of her character than that of anyone else, she was still strong enough to bare her true self to him without fear of his disapproval. During his inoculation, John offered to provide Abigail with a list of her faults. Abigail, being confident and outspoken, eagerly welcomed what he had to say. She knew that John would not believe any outlandish accusations and she was willing to change if his points were valid. Abigail even began to mention some of John's flaws, further illustrating her security both in herself and in their relationship.[26]

Most of John's complaints about Abigail were social flaws, such as not taking an interest in card playing or learning to sing well. Abigail opened her response by stating "Lysander must excuse me if I still persist in some of [the flaws he listed], at least till I am convinced that an alteration would contribute to his happiness." To John's accusation that it was improper for women to cross their legs while sitting, Abigail retorted that he had no business taking interest in a woman's legs. Abigail protested only one accusation seriously: that of being too modest and formal in front of company. John asserted that

[24] JA to AS, April 14, 1764 and AS to JA, April 15, 1764, *AFC*, I, 29-31.
[25] AS to JA, April 16, 1764, *AFC*, I, 32.
[26] AS to JA, April 19, 1764 and AS to JA, April 30, 1764, *AFC*, I, 36-37, 42.

such conduct forced others to be more reserved, which was contrary to the newly valued freedom of behavior. Abigail refused to modify this behavior because John's advice called for what she viewed as "Violations of Decency… which would render me unfit to Herd even with the Brutes." This resistance to altering her self-conscious behavior was later echoed—nearly word for word—by Abigail's younger sister Elizabeth. Abigail, already ten years into her marriage with John, had scolded Elizabeth for her immodest behavior toward the latter's future first husband, John Shaw. In response, Elizabeth ironically denied that she had been overly-affectionate with Shaw, claiming that she simply behaved according to "the dictates of Humanity, Benevolence, and Candour" as she would to any human being. Surprised at the outrage her family felt toward her behavior, Elizabeth wrote to Abigail: "I earnestly pray that I may not alter my Conduct in one single Point, till I am fully convinced my principles are wrong."[27] The similarity between their claims, even though a decade apart, indicated that the Smith girls were raised to hold fast in their values until thoroughly convinced otherwise. Abigail already had a firm foundation in Puritan tradition that prescribed women to be an "ornament of a 'meek and Quiet Spirit'" and she would stay true to her values, regardless of wanting to "appear agreeable in the Eyes of Lysander."[28]

During the same inoculation, John offered to write Abigail descriptions of all the people he met. Abigail accepted his offer but revealed to John that she sometimes found him "too severe, and that you do not make quite so many allowances as Human Nature requires." On the other hand, she admitted that her restriction to the private sphere and John's greater experiences with people might have allowed him better insight into the

[27] Elizabeth Smith to Abigail Adams, March 7, 1774, *AFC*, I, 105-106.
[28] JA to AS, May 7, 1764 and AS to JA, May 9, 1764, *AFC*, I, 45-47; Keller, *Patriotism and the Female Sex*, 15.

true nature of people.[29] Even though Abigail recognized that John may have had a broader knowledge of the world that she could not possess, she still felt comfortable enough with him and with her own intelligence to divulge her opinion.

For all of Abigail's "sauciness" to John, however, she remained strictly within the private domestic sphere throughout their courtship and early marriage. She read the descriptions John wrote about people he encountered but never responded in kind. She also wrote as if John's experiences would affect her rather than vice versa. Abigail worried for John's health during his inoculation, entreating him to "be careful of that Health upon which depends the happiness of Your A Smith."[30] The prevailing sentiment regarding women was not viewed by contemporaries as oppressive; most women accepted and even preferred the roles to which they believed they were better suited. Abigail wrote to her cousin, Isaac Smith, Jr., during his journey to England that she often longed to make that trip but that women were restricted from such fancies. The distinction Abigail made between men and women was not based on mental capacity as she believed that women "inherit an Eaquel Share of curiosity"; her justification for female restrictions was the "Natural tenderness and Delicacy of our Constitutions."[31] Abigail's claim hearkened to her earlier statement that the reason John's judgments might be more valid than hers was because of his vocation, which women were denied. Women were accepting of their limitations within the private sphere but it did not necessarily imply that they were mentally inferior to men.

Not all contemporary women had as much confidence in their gender as Abigail. During the beginning of her correspondence with Mercy Otis Warren, Abigail was often

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[29] AS to JA, September 12, 1763 and AS to JA, April 12, 1764, *AFC*, I, 8-9, 26.
[30] AS to JA, April 8, 1763, *AFC*, I, 19.
[31] AA to IS, April 20, 1771, *AFC*, I, 76.

slighted in favor of her husband. Most of the letters from Mercy to Abigail appeared to be directed to John as they discussed his political dealings and praised his judgment. Mercy criticized Abigail's literary analyses yet requested John's "judicious eye." Regardless of her admission of Abigail's "taste and Discernment," Mercy claimed "I will not trust the partiality of My own sex so much as to rely on Mrs. Adams judgment."[32] Following Abigail's lofty praise for Mercy's intelligence and having some pride in her own, this must have come as a harsh remark. Whereas Abigail believed that she was John's peer, Mercy followed the Enlightenment rhetoric, which still placed women firmly behind men.

John and Abigail married on October 25, 1764. The wedding took place in Abigail's hometown of Weymouth but the couple moved into a house adjacent to that of John's widowed mother in Braintree. In the month prior to the wedding, John and Abigail made arrangements to prepare the house for their arrival. While John tried to help Abigail find a young girl to help around the house, he was called away on business and regretfully informed her that "I can take no Care at all about Help or Furniture or any Thing else."[33] Abigail was forced to make the decision about the help on her own and she had no help from John moving her things to the new house. Even this early in their relationship, Abigail was already exposed to the extra demands she would be forced to handle because of the demands of John's career.

Not many letters between John and Abigail exist during the early years of their marriage. Unfortunately there can be no substantial insight into the interactions between John and Abigail during this time together. When they were not together, the letters that

[32] Mercy Otis Warren to AA, January 19, 1774 and Mercy Otis Warren to AA, February 27, 1774, *AFC*, I, 91-93, 99.
[33] JA to AS, September 30, 1764, *AFC*, I, 47-49.

were written were generally from John to Abigail likely because he traveled so often for his work that she would have been unable to keep track and get letters to him before he moved on. Instead, Abigail alleviated her loneliness by writing to other people. The majority of the correspondence between Abigail and her sister Mary focused on domestic issues, but Abigail was increasingly willing to voice her views about people around her. Abigail commented on the immorality of the general population, writing to her sister: "This is a selfish world you know. Interest governs it, there are but very few who are moved by any other Spring. They are Generous, Benevolent and Friendly when it is for their interest, when any thing is to be got by it."[34] By 1767 both Abigail and Mary indicated their interest in news of political dealings but did not actually discuss politics.

The development of John's letters over time illustrates his growing willingness to involve his wife in his opinions. During the courtship there was little content beyond flirtation and an occasional social comment. John did, however, discuss some philosophical ideals and trusted in Abigail's ability to understand him. John described his solitary experience during his smallpox inoculation and claimed that he would be happy in his solitude like monks and hermits if it was possible for him to forget about Abigail. He explained his theory behind the analogy, writing that the passion and devotion of monks and hermits to their religious beliefs made them the happiest mortals, but claimed his love for Abigail rivaled theirs. John's ultimate happiness existed in the "hopes to be bound to your Ladyship in the soft Ligaments of Matrimony." This early in the relationship, John used abstract conversation as a means of complimenting his future wife.[35]

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[34] AA to Mary Cranch, October 6, 1766, *AFC*, I, 56.
[35] JA to AA, April 11, 1764, *AFC*, I, 22.

During the early years of their marriage, John began to write Abigail about more practical information. When he was away for work, John would sometimes write about the slowness and tediousness of business and express his desire to be home with his family. The most he wrote about his work itself was to refer to several cases that he had finished and how many more he had ahead of him before he could return.[36] John did not discuss business details or political information with Abigail; instead, he wrote to her in the context of domestic concerns and when he could next be home by her side.

As pre-Revolutionary events began to unfold, so too did John's personal ideological opinions. While he still did not encourage a two-way conversation with his wife, John was eager to share his sentiments about the times in which they lived. Immediately following news of the Boston Port Act in 1774, for example, John revealed the first openly revolutionary rhetoric to his wife:

> We live my dear Soul, in an Age of Tryal. What will be the Consequence I know not. The Town of Boston, for ought I can see, must suffer Martyrdom: It must expire: And our principal Consolation is, that it dies in a noble Cause. The Cause of Truth, of Virtue, of Liberty and of Humanity: and that it will probably have a glorious Reformation, to greater Wealth, Splendor and Power than ever.[37]

As John traveled away from Boston on the eve of the rebellion, he became caught up in the revolutionary spirit and from then on began to write more about his observations to Abigail. John wrote of the daily controversies surrounding public officials and relayed the sentiments of the people. John observed in the town of York, for instance, a large number of people sympathetic to the tea tax that displeased many throughout the colonies. At the same time, however, John hinted at people's disapproval of the Chief

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[36] JA to AA, July 1, 1769, *AFC*, I, 67.
[37] JA to AA, May 12, 1774, *AFC*, I, 107.

Justice.[38] Despite the fact that John did not go into great detail about his experience, he communicated political gossip to Abigail. He still did not, however, initiate a political discussion with his wife and Abigail did not respond in kind.

Interestingly, even before this time Abigail was commenting to others on the growing tensions between the colonies and Great Britain. Abigail wrote to her cousin Isaac Smith Jr. before and during his 1771 trip to Britain of the "cruel Mother Country" and "the unnatural treatment which this our poor America has received from her."[39] This letter was neither confidential nor hidden from John's eyes; rather, his exposure to Abigail's correspondence is illustrated by the fact that he added his own comments to her letter to Isaac Smith. Even though documentation of John and Abigail's time together does not exist and their own letters do not include political discussion, the only way to account for her informed opinion was that John and Abigail had openly discussed these issues in person. This was perhaps due to the fact that Abigail could not respond to John's letters and he saw his time away as more of a burden than as an opportunity to converse with his wife.

Abigail's interest in the unfolding events of the Revolution likewise reflected her growing understanding of the political scene. In 1773, while away from John and her children on a trip to visit her family in Weymouth, Abigail inquired about news of the latest events regarding the discontented Bostonians from John.[40] Even though she had never written a single word to John involving the public realm, she must have had conversations in person with her husband prior to this. Implicit is the idea that John's willingness to speak of political dealings with his wife gave her the courage to step out of

[38] JA to AA, June 29, 1774, *AFC*, I, 110.
[39] AA to Isaac Smith Jr., January 4,1770, and AA to Isaac Smith Jr., April 20, 1771, *AFC*, I, 67, 76.
[40] AA to JA, December 20, 1773, *AFC*, I, 90.

her own private sphere and show interest. Important to note is that Abigail's interest in contemporary events did not necessarily connote that she was a politically natured woman; instead, her interest was likely based on her concern about the welfare of her family. The events of the Revolution did not unfold in a distant land: Abigail and John were close enough to the location of the Boston Massacre that John felt the need to hurry home to reassure his pregnant wife that the incident had ended.[41] Abigail was certainly intelligent enough to understand the implications of the pre-war events and was able to pursue a greater understanding with the support of her spouse, but her interest was not necessarily an end in itself.

Abigail's family background and preparation for a life with a frequently absent husband prepared her for the years of separation that were to follow. In 1770 John was elected to the Massachusetts General Court. In his autobiography, John recalled Abigail's reaction when she found out he was leaving to fulfill his first public office:

> That excellent Lady, who has always encouraged me, burst into a flood of Tears, but said she was very sensible of all the Danger to her and to our Children as well as to me, but she thought I had done as I ought, she was very willing to share in all that was to come and place her trust in Providence.[42]

This description revealed that, regardless of her upbringing, Abigail was reluctant to lose the company of her husband. Still, she supported him because public service was his duty and desire and she put aside her own needs and those of her family. Abigail later wrote of her loss of domestic felicity, "I hope the publick will reap what I sacrifice."[43] She

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[41] Gelles, *Portia*, 2; L. H. Butterfield, et al., eds., *Diary and Autobiography of John Adams*, 4 vols. (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 1961), III, 291-92.
[42] Ibid., 294-95.
[43] AA to JA, November 27, 1775, *AFC*, I, 329.

recognized her plight in terms of her republican duty, a concept that will be discussed in further detail in the following chapter.

The implications of John's continuous absence were great. Abigail's need to finalize arrangements on her own before their wedding showed that she went into her marriage knowing that this would often be the case and was prepared to take care of what was needed. It is important to note, however, that these absences were meant to be only occasional and for relatively short periods of time. The furthest John traveled on the court circuit was to Maine, which was at the time still part of the Massachusetts colony. Abigail had not been forced to make substantial arrangements because her husband would always return soon enough to take care of them himself.

A major turning point in the Adams' lives and the beginning of Abigail's unique hardships came when John was elected to the first Continental Congress in June 1774. Up until this point, Abigail had performed her wifely tasks just as any other Quincy woman would have. She stepped in when John was away and made sure that her household was running smoothly and her family was well-supported. For the first time, however, the Revolution began to directly affect the personal lives of John and Abigail when he was called away for an extended period of time to a location further from home than he had ever been. The first letter John wrote to Abigail following his election reveals his understanding that Abigail would be forced to shoulder much more of the burden at home. Even two months before John set out for Philadelphia, he began to instruct Abigail in the business she would need to conduct in his absence.[44] The lack of similar business instructions prior to this event implies that Abigail never had to step so far out of her usual bounds in order to make up for John's absence. Because the colonies

[44] JA to AA, June 23, 1774, *AFC*, I, 109.

functioned as separate entities, such distant travel was a new ordeal for both the men who sought to serve their people and the wives they left behind.

On the eve of the Revolution, men and women alike found themselves in an unusual position that called for greater fluidity of roles. Abigail's lineage and upbringing prepared her to be exactly the kind of wife that a public figure such as John wanted and needed her to be. She was bred to handle whatever situation she faced, including domestic distress and political upheaval. She was outspoken and was capable of thinking for herself but respected the existing gender divisions enough to speak "without restraint" only to those who were closest to her. While perfectly capable of reasonable thought, she expressed her judgments only within her own realm. Abigail wanted to remain in the private sphere but was also prepared to step in for John's prescribed role while he was called away for public service. Regardless of Abigail's desire for a quiet life, she was already imbued with all the characteristics required of a woman during the Revolution and the wife of one of its leading figures. Even when John's ambition and duty called for him to leave behind his own family, Abigail was willing to adjust accordingly to help him pursue the path he chose, "for I have too much pride to be a clog to any body."[45]

[45] AS to JA, September 12, 1763, *AFC,* I, 9

Chapter Two

"I know your time is not yours, nor mine"[1]: The Coming of the American Revolution, 1774-1777

On August 10, 1774, John Adams left his family in the Boston suburb of Braintree to pursue his political career at what would become known as the First Continental Congress, held in Philadelphia. It was to be his first excursion outside of the familiar New England and his first extended assignment away from home. Although at this point open hostilities with the British had yet to break out, Abigail found herself raising her children—Nabby, age nine; John Quincy, age seven; Charles, age four; and Thomas, age two—alone in the most radical colony of the time. Prior to John's departure, the Adamses had been living in Boston and were close to the scene of the Boston Massacre. John worried about the effect the news would have on his then-pregnant wife, as was mentioned in the previous chapter.[2] Because the violence was increasing at an alarming rate, the family closed up its house in Boston and moved back to Braintree before John's assignment.

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[1] AA to JA, July 5, 1775, *AFC*, I, 239.
[2] Butterfield, *Diary and Autobiography of John Adams*, III, 291.

Though relatively short by their own future standards (this separation lasted approximately three months), John's absence was the beginning of Abigail's personal sacrifice to the Revolutionary cause. Left alone with a farm and four young children, Abigail's major concern was her husband's well-being. Despite the brevity of their separation, Abigail had yet to hear from John a month after his departure. She knew that Samuel Adams and Thomas Cushing, two of the delegates who accompanied John to Philadelphia, had already written letters to their loved ones and was anxious for her own.[3] Once she finally received her first letter from John, Abigail declared, "It really gave me such a flow of Spirits that I was not composed eno[ugh] to sleep till one oclock."[4] Despite being reassured that her husband was safe and had not forgotten her, Abigail still expressed a fear that would last throughout John's participation in the Revolution:

> Many have been the anxious hours I have spent since [the day you left]—the threatening aspect of our publick affairs, the complicated distress of this province, the Arduous and perplexed Business in which you are engaged, have all conspired to agitate my bosom, with fears and apprehensions to which I have heretofore been a stranger, and far from thinking the Scene closed, it looks as tho the curtain was but just drawn and only the first Scene of the infernal plot disclosed…

Although Abigail expressed her understanding and support that John not be an "inactive Spectator," she was well aware that an outbreak of open war would result in the complete sacrifice of her personal happiness.[5]

In the meantime, Abigail was fairly comfortable with the demands of the home. Her previous exposure to the world of business and farming (while John was traveling for his law practice) had left her well-prepared to handle what was required of her. A

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[3] AA to JA, September 2, 1774, *AFC*, I, 146.
[4] AA to JA, September 14, 1774, *AFC*, I, 151.
[5] AA to JA, October 16, 1774, *AFC*, I, 172.

drought during John's current absence to Philadelphia affected the health of their cows, but Abigail still managed as best she could without the prospect of help from her husband. At this time, John requested that Abigail assess the situation of his books in their Boston home and allowed her to judge whether it was best to move them to Braintree or leave them there. Abigail made her own educated decision to leave them in Boston because "I believe they are safe there, and it would incommode the Gentlemen to remove them."[6] This first foray into life without John was well within Abigail's capacity due to her prior experiences of acting alone.

Abigail arranged for seven-year-old John Quincy's education with her cousin and John's co-worker, John Thaxter. Additionally, Abigail developed her own knowledge of historical governments through the use of her husband's library and had John Quincy read to her to help develop his understanding as well. She began to philosophize about the conflict and relate historical events to the contemporary efforts of the colonies. In contemplating the possibility of a bloodless freedom, Abigail related that "all the Misfortunes of Sparta were occasiond by their too great Sollicitude for present tranquility, and by an excessive love of peace that neglected the means of making it sure and lasting." Abigail went on to liken the weight of the work of John and his fellow delegates in Philadelphia to the overthrow of Julius Caesar in Rome: "The first of September or the month of September, perhaps may be of as much importance to Great Britan as the Ides of March were to Ceaser."[7] Abigail did more than just nominally support the Revolution; she fully believed in her husband's efforts and the cause he supported and was willing to sacrifice in order to see the goals of the colonies met.

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[6] JA to AA, September 8, 1774, and AA to JA, October 16, 1774, *AFC*, I, 151, 173.
[7] AA to JA, August 19, 1774, and AA to JA, September 16, 1774 *AFC*, I, 142-43, 153.

Abigail played the role of a modest informer for John while he was away during this three-month separation. Even though she provided a lot of information to her husband, she believed that what she had to say was of limited benefit to him. In one letter she related the latest news to John, then noted that "…all which proceedings you will have a more particular account of than I am able to give you from the publick papers. But as to the Movements of this Town perhaps you may not hear them from any other person."[8] The majority of the information that Abigail relayed was written in a removed, emotionless tone. On two occasions, however, she supplied her opinions, albeit reserved and apologetic. Upon the outbreak of a "conspiracy of the Negroes" in Boston, Abigail expressed her republican sentiments to her primary confidante: "I wish most sincerely there was not a Slave in the province. It allways appeard a most iniquitious Scheme to me—fight ourselfs for what we are daily robbing and plundering from those who have as good a right to freedom as we have."[9] By recognizing the incongruity of revolutionary ideals and slavery, Abigail touched upon a subject that many leading men avoided. She refrained from making overly brash statements, however, and simply expressed her thoughts to someone who would not judge her.

In a similar vein, Abigail contemplated the societal norms that she believed contributed to the "Scourge and heavy punishment from heaven" that existed in the form of the ongoing violence throughout the colonies. Abigail addressed the virtue of the men involved in the Revolution, expressing her dissatisfaction with "too many high sounding words, and too few actions to correspond with them." This was a sentiment that John would echo many times throughout his correspondence. Abigail embraced

[8] AA to JA, September 14, 1774, *AFC*, I, 151.
[9] AA to JA, September 22, 1774, *AFC*, I, 162.

nonimportation and also called for a "return… to their primitive Simplicity of Manners" and claimed that "as for me I will seek wool and flax and work willingly with my Hands."[10] Disdain for extravagance became an integral concept of republicanism because Americans believed that the importation of foreign luxuries—and the subsequent debts accrued—kept them dependent upon Britain's economy.[11] This rejection of luxury would become an essential principle of surviving the war and the willingness to manufacture goods at home that had previously been imported contributed to the future success of an independent American economy. By adopting modesty, economy, and virtuous action, Abigail believed the violence could be terminated and the American cause would prevail.

In late 1774, Abigail wrote a remarkable letter meant for Catharine Sawbridge Macaulay, an English historian and firm believer in republicanism, about the state of women in the colonies. Introduced to Macaulay by Mercy Otis Warren, Abigail was evidently flustered at the opportunity of writing to such an influential woman, as is evidenced by the extremely formal and complex introduction of her letter:

> To [American Ladies] Mrs. Macaulay is sufficiently distinguished by her superior abilities, and altho she who is now venturing to address her cannot lay claim to eaquil accomplishments with the Lady before introduced [Mercy Otis Warren], yet she flatters herself she is no ways deficient in her esteem for a Lady who so warmly interests herself in the cause of America.

Despite this display of nervousness, Abigail aptly articulated the republican virtues by which she lived. She described the situation that the British had created in the colonies, with "all the Horrours of a civil war threatening us on one hand, and the chains of Slavery

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[10] AA to JA, October 16, 1774, *AFC*, I, 173.
[11] Woody Holton, *Forced Founders: Indians, Debtors, Slaves, and the Making of the American Revolution in Virginia* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999), 82.

ready forged for us on the other." Abigail assured Macaulay that this did not result in chaos, but instead "each one strives to shew his neighbour that the restraints of Honour and conscience are more powerful motives, than the judiciary proceedings of the Law."[12]

This concept of American moral superiority ran throughout Abigail's correspondence for the rest of her life. She also reiterated her belief that Americans should "scorn to wear [Great Britain's] livery, and shall think ourselves more decently attired in the coarse and plain vestures of our own Manufactury than in all the gaudy trapings that adorn the slave." Abigail, like the Founding Fathers more often celebrated on July 4, saw death and ruin as preferable to "slavery"; this republican rhetoric was commonplace among patriots. Finally, Abigail likened the bond between the colonists and England to the "Gordean knot. It never can be untied, but the sword may cut it, and America if she falls to use the words of the revered and ever honourd Mr. Pitt, will fall like a strong Man, will embrace the pillars of State and pull down the constitution along with her." [13] Well over a year before the signing of the Declaration of Independence, Abigail expressed the belief that the failure of American liberty would have dire repercussions for the entire world.

Most of John's letters to Abigail were short and related only general information about his business in the First Continental Congress. He refrained from giving a detailed description of his trip to Philadelphia or the people he came across. He often inquired about how things were in Boston and reassured Abigail her solitude was not in vain. As far as business, however, he claimed, "The Designs, and Plans of the Congress, must not

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[12] AA to Catharine Sawbridge Macaulay, 1774, *AFC*, I, 177-79. The source for this letter is a draft and therefore may never have actually been sent to the recipient. See editor's note 2, 188.
[13] Ibid.

be communicated, untill compleated."[14] At this point, the unreliability of the postal system and the radical nature of the gathering in Philadelphia made any information leak very hazardous to the objectives of the Congress. John declared that "there is so much Rascallity in the Management of Letters… that I am determined to write nothing of Consequence, not even to the Friend of my Bosom, but by Conveyances which I can be sure of."[15] Until support of the second gathering became more widespread and information of their efforts was publicized, John maintained this muted form of correspondence. In effect, the information Abigail received from John was limited and she was unable to concern herself in the politics of the Congress as much as she later desired.

Around the time of John's initial involvement in Philadelphia, Mercy Otis Warren appeared to begin to appreciate Abigail's friendship in its own right, regardless of her connection to John. The day before John left for his first assignment, Mercy maintained her glorified view of John but confessed personal concerns about the potential war to Abigail.[16] From this point on, their relationship consisted of more than just political dialogue: Abigail and Mercy continually supported one another during the hardships of the Revolution. Abigail sometimes divulged more candid feelings with Mercy than she did with John. Abigail complained to Mercy, for instance, that she felt "multiplied in cares to which I know myself uneaquel."[17] Whereas Abigail attempted to maintain a composed appearance for her husband, letters to Mercy served as her outlet for her true feelings of inadequacy. The two still shared information of the events of their respective

[14] JA to AA, September 14, 1774, *AFC*, I, 155.
[15] JA to AA, September 18, 1774, *AFC*, I, 157.
[16] Mercy Otis Warren to AA, August 9, 1774, *AFC*, I, 138-39.
[17] AA to Mercy Otis Warren, April 13, 1776, *AFC*, I, 377.

towns and their views on the developing conflict, but their respect for one another and their shared roles as wives of prominent revolutionaries tied them closer together.

The gap between the First and Second Continental Congresses was only a few months, but Abigail's experiences during the former led her to have a more sophisticated understanding of her role. Once John returned to Philadelphia for the Second Congress, Abigail adopted a new pen name. She stopped using "Diana" once she was married but it was not until this point, over a decade after their marriage, that Abigail began to sign her letters "Portia." Historically, Porcia[18] was the wife of Brutus, a Roman statesman who opposed the tyrannous rule of Julius Caesar in first century B.C.[19] Ancient Roman sources tell the story of Brutus' anxiety over the plot to assassinate Caesar. Noticing his distress, "Porcia, being addicted to philosophy, a great lover of her husband, and full of an understanding courage" injured herself to prove that she was worthy of her husband's secrets, showing she was strong enough to withstand torture to keep his confidence. Porcia declared to her husband that their marriage put her in the position

> to bear a part in all your good and all your evil fortunes… what evidence of my love… can you receive, if I may not share with you in bearing your hidden griefs, nor to be admitted to any of your counsels that require secrecy and trust? I know very well that women seem to be of too weak a nature to be trusted with secrets; but certainly, Brutus, a virtuous birth and education, and the company of the good and honourable, are of some force to the forming our manners.

Abigail's namesake articulated the view she had of her own situation, in which she stood loyally by her husband even in difficult times and was worthy of his ultimate trust. Even if women were weak, both Porcia and Abigail were of a greater stock and wanted to prove themselves no matter the sacrifice. Reinforcing this view, Brutus said of his wife,

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[18] "Porcia" is an alternate spelling of "Portia."
[19] Erkkila, "Revolutionary Women," 199.

"though the natural weakness of her body hinders her from doing what only the strength of men can perform, yet she has a mind as valiant and as active for the good of her country as the best of us."[20] By adopting this name, Abigail revealed her belief that she was—or at least that she aspired to become—the trustworthy, suffering wife to a statesman.

The stoic suffering for which Abigail prepared herself became an important tool for John as well. Soon after John's departure for his first of four trips to the Second Continental Congress, he anxiously turned his eyes back to Boston. By the time he left for Philadelphia again, the Battle of Lexington and Concord had already taken place, leading to open and widespread violence between the British army and the colonial militias. The focus of the Congress was on New England, but John had left his family there in the midst of real danger. This was not to be taken lightly, as John professed "We are distressed here for Want of Intelligence and Information from you and from Boston, Cambridge &c."[21] John's anxieties were a mixture of private worry for his family and public worry for his future country.

During the next few months, it appeared that Abigail's letters provided information that the Congress could not otherwise procure. Following a battle at Grape Island, Abigail gave an account largely consisting of her own personal experience of the event: "When I rose about six oclock I was told that the Drums had been some time beating… I immediatly sent [off] an express to know the occasion, and found the whole Town in confusion." John later requested more details about the battle, in which Abigail promptly indulged him. Her second rendering of the battle still included personal

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[20] Plutarch, *Marcus Brutus*, tr. John Dryden, 75. <http://classics.mit.edu/Plutarch/m_brutus.html>
[21] JA to AA, May 29, 1775, *AFC*, I, 207.

information—she wrote that both of John's brothers were involved in the fighting—but she also provided him with the kind of military and strategic details he wanted.[22]

The Battle of Bunker Hill and the fall of Charlestown to the British on June 17, 1775, was such an important event during the early stages of the war that John received several private accounts of the incident. Abigail's letter, however, was the earliest dated letter and was written a week before any other family members. Even if her letter was not as detailed as those of the men who corresponded with John, Abigail was still the first to relay the event to him. She once again added the personal element to her letter by relating the death of John's close friend and physician Dr. Joseph Warren. Still, Abigail muted the importance of her account by stating that "I have not pretended to be perticuliar with regard to what I have heard, because I know you will collect better intelligence."[23] Abigail's claim had limited validity as John continued to ask for information throughout the British siege of Boston: "We are constantly obliged to go to the Delegates from Connecticutt and Rhode Island for Intelligence of what is passing at Boston, Charlestown, Cambridge, Roxbury and Watertown." Additionally, John appreciated hearing about the personal side of the war:

> I want to be informed from Hour to Hour, of any Thing which passes in Boston—whether our Friends come out—what Property they bring?—how they fare in Town? How the Tories subsist &c. &c. &c. Whether the Troops are healthy or sickly? I also want to know every Thing which passes in our Army. The Feats and Exploits of our little Naval Armaments would be very agreable.[24]

Throughout the course of the war and John's political assignments, Abigail was to be the only steady source of information from Boston.

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[22] AA to JA, May 24, 1775, JA to AA, June 10, 1775, and AA to JA, June 22, 1775, *AFC*, I, 204, 214, 225-26.
[23] AA to JA, June 18-20, 1775, *AFC*, I, 222-23.
[24] JA to AA, July 4, 1775, and JA to AA, September 26, 1775, *AFC*, I 238, 285.

For much of his time in Philadelphia, John voiced a continued distrust of the postal system. In July 1775, two of John's letters were intercepted by the British and were published in papers, stirring up resentment from other delegates that he criticized.[25] Despite his claims that he had to censor his letters, John began to write more openly as he was called away from home for longer periods of time. During his first three stints at the Second Continental Congress, John delved into his political reflections and opinions with Abigail. Prior to the Declaration of Independence, John admitted to Abigail, "Reconciliation if practicable and Peace if attainable, you very well know would be as agreable to my Inclinations and as advantageous to my Interest, as to any Man's. But I see no Prospect, no Probability, no Possibility." While John appeared to still have some reservations about a complete break from Britain, his letters to Abigail served as his outlet. As he reflected about the state of the colonies as they moved closer to independence, John declared "This is not Independency you know.—What is? Why Government in every Colony, a Confederation among them all, and Treaties with foreign Nations, to acknowledge Us a Sovereign State, and all that."[26] Although the Congress was still a few months away from formulating the exact stipulations of independence, John openly related his own personal sentiments about the matter to his wife.

Perhaps more revealing than his individual reflections on the Revolution, John began to invite Abigail to express her own opinions. It was clear to John by mid-1776 that Abigail was intellectually as involved in the political developments of independence as was any other American: "I am at this present Writing perplexed and plagued with two knotty Problems in Politicks. You love to pick a political Bone, so I will even throw it to

[25] JA to AA, July 24, 1775, *AFC*, I, 255-56. See editor's note 1.
[26] JA to AA, February 18, 1776, and JA to AA, April 12, 1776, *AFC*, I, 348, 377.

you." Abigail's response certainly would have been an informative glimpse into her private thoughts but John's letter was delayed for several months (in addition to the bearer presenting John's expensive canister of tea to the wrong Mrs. Adams, which elicited greater attention at the time).[27] Regardless of how effectual her opinion may or may not have been, John invited Abigail into the discussion.

John's attempt to instigate political discourse with Abigail did not mean that she had previously been silent. As the Second Continental Congress wore on, Abigail had increasingly voiced her views. Abigail declared to Mercy in early 1775, "the Friends of Liberty, should any such remain will have one option still left, and will rather chuse no doubt to die the last British freemen, than bear to live the first of British Slaves."[28] Even though she viewed the British as the offending party, she once again addressed the moral faults by which the colonists brought about their own problems: "We have done Evil or our Enimies would be at peace with us. The Sin of Slavery as well as many others is not washed away."[29] Abigail wanted more than just freedom; she wanted her homeland to be in line with the virtuous republican ideals of justice and equality.

Abigail had a few suggestions for the men at Philadelphia as well. She brought to light the home front ramifications of the Congress's decisions. Abigail asked, for instance, that John mention a reinstatement of a New England excise on liquor, citing the reason that "the too frequent use of Spirit endangers the well being of Society." If republicanism was to prevail, its members needed to maintain moral decency. She also mentioned the need to keep the gold and silver supply within the colonies, the lack of which later caused a huge economic crisis in which both Abigail in Braintree and John in

[27] JA to AA, July 29, 1776, *AFC*, II, 68-69. See editor's note 2.
[28] AA to Mercy Otis Warren, February 3, 1775, *AFC*, I, 183.
[29] AA to JA, October 25, 1775, *AFC*, I, 313.

Philadelphia would suffer. Abigail even criticized an overly conservative wording of a bit of legislation that claimed the conflict was between "Great Britain and the colonies." For a relatively minor detail—considering independence had not yet been formally declared—Abigail was rather forceful: "we are all very angry with your House of Assembly for their instructions… and would rather endure any hardships than submit to [British wrongdoings]."[30] After likening the relationship between the belligerent parties to slavery, Abigail wanted the Congress to be more assertive in its dealing with Britain so that the latter would recognize the severity of the situation.

The content of Abigail's letters during this period focused almost completely on the war. She did not want to burden John with the details of the farm or her domestic troubles as long as she could handle them: "As to all your own private affairs I generally avoid mentioning them to you; I take the best care I am capable of them." Instead, she sometimes based the frequency of letters she sent on the amount of important military or political events that took place near Boston. In addition to relaying the events of the war, Abigail also supplied her own personal speculation on the outcome of events: "If we have [no] Reinforcements here, I believe we shall be driven from the sea coast." Once the British left Boston and she was no longer in the midst of the war, Abigail remained eager to stay informed.[31] She turned to John for the information that he once needed from her.

Now that the immediate threat of danger from the British had passed, Abigail began to focus more on political theory. In her famous "Remember the Ladies" letter, Abigail delved into a realm even more taboo than the emancipation of slaves: the political

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[30] AA to JA, December 10, 1775, *AFC*, I, 336-38. See editor's note 9.
[31] AA to JA, March 10, 1776, AA to JA, March 16-17, 1776, and AA to JA, April 7, 1776, *AFC*, I, 355, 357-59, 374.

and legal rights of women. Abigail's pregnant claim was revolutionary in essence yet not as radical as it may appear:

> I long to hear that you have declared an independency—and by the way in the new Code of Laws which I suppose it will be necessary for you to make I desire you would Remember the Ladies, and be more generous and favourable to them than your ancestors. Do not put such unlimited power into the hands of the Husbands. Remember all Men would be tyrants if they could. If perticuliar care and attention is not paid to the Laidies we are determined to foment a Rebelion and will not hold ourselves bound by any Laws in which we have no voice, or Representation… Regard us then as Beings placed by providence under your protection and in immitation of the Supreem Being make use of that power only for our happiness.[32]

Abigail voiced her argument in the context of the very revolution the men were fighting at the time. In fact, her discussion of women stemmed from her hopes for the future of the country in general. She criticized the undisputed tyranny of husbands over wives and the hypocrisy of subjecting women to laws in which they had no say. She also implied the overall need for a strong government to prevent an American repeat of British oppression. In the end, Abigail retracted the extremist implications of her statement, focusing her argument on the duty of men to protect women. Abigail did not demand anything as drastic as women's suffrage: she instead put her concerns in the most radical terms she could in order to get John's attention and secure safety and justice for her sex. The fact that Abigail even entertained the idea of political rights for women—and so willingly voiced that idea to her husband—testifies to the extent to which she began to develop her own ideas and apply the revolutionary rhetoric to which she subscribed.

John's response was less than favorable. He expressed his views on women's suffrage around the same time to a member of the Massachusetts General Court. John believed that, while women were naturally unfit for politics because of their delicacy and

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[32] AA to JA, March 31, 1776, *AFC*, I, 370.

their preoccupation with raising children, they were no less intellectually capable than poor white men.[33] John likely made this statement to demean the latter rather than exalt the former. At the same time, however, he did not wholly discredit women either, citing their inexperience with worldly enterprises as a major reason for their inability to make informed decisions. Whether he honestly disapproved of Abigail's request or if simply did not believe such legislation would pass, John dismissed the idea as a joke. John argued that men's leadership of women was only nominal. If men allowed any women in the political realm, men would lose the on arena they truly dominated and would suffer the "Despotism of the Peticoat."[34]

Abigail clearly resented John's remarks but she remained within her bounds as a wife and for the most part backed down. She maintained that she thought it contradictory that the men were "proclaiming peace and good will to Men, Emancipating all Nations" yet still ignoring the women. She more bluntly shared her feelings about both the subject and John's snub in a letter to Mercy, in which Abigail asked Mercy to help her petition the Congress for some change. The seriousness of this request is likewise unclear, but Abigail expressed her hope that the Congress would have established legislation more representative of women's rights than Britain had done.[35] The conversation ended there, but Abigail had ventured to question the universality of the republican virtues and laws to which she sacrificed her domestic happiness. It was not the first time Abigail voiced her concern about American adherence to the principles of the newly forming country, and it would not be the last.

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[33] JA to James Sullivan, May 26, 1776, *The Adams Papers: Papers of John Adams*, ed. Robert J. Taylor, et al., 3 vols. (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1979) IV, 208-12.
[34] JA to AA, April 14, 1776, *AFC*, I, 382-83.
[35] AA to Mercy Otis Warren, April 27, 1776, and AA to JA, May 7, 1776, *AFC*, I, 397-98, 402-3.

Despite John's indifference toward Abigail's request, he continually engaged in political discussions with her. Abigail wondered why John wrote to her without any discussion of politics, to which he responded, "You think I dont wrote Politicks enough! Indeed I have a surfeit of them. But I shall give you now and then a Taste, since you have such a Goust [i.e., fondness] for them."[36] Throughout his time away from home, John supported Abigail's curiosity. He provided her with increasingly in-depth information as time went on and her interest and understanding grew. As John acquainted Abigail with the talks between the newly independent United States and neutral European countries, he claimed "your political Curiosity has extended itself e'er this all over Europe."[37] Abigail's interest in political discussions did not mean she was always correct in her judgments. She supported an act that controlled wages and prices but promptly recanted after it proved to do more harm to the economy than good.[38]

Aside from Abigail's developing political doctrine, her main duty was to take care of her children. For the majority of the period from 1774 to 1777, Abigail raised all four children alone. John often provided advice as to which subjects were particularly important and reminded Abigail that "the moral Sentiments of his Heart, are more important than the Furniture of his Head."[39] For all the advice John wrote, however, Abigail alone was charged with raising the next generation of America's leaders. The concept of Republican Motherhood placed a newfound importance on women's roles during the Revolution. They were not uninvolved bystanders; instead, women had the duty to perpetuate republican ideals while the men were away at war. By preparing their

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[36] JA to AA, April 2, 1777, *AFC*, II, 195.
[37] JA to AA, April 3, 1777, *AFC*, II, 197.
[38] AA to JA, March 23, 1777, *AFC*, II, 185.
[39] JA to AA, June 29, 1777, *AFC*, II, 271.

children to direct the future of the country, women ensured the continuation of the values for which so many people—men and women alike—sacrificed their lives.

Perhaps the greatest education Abigail gave any of her children came on the day of the Battle of Bunker Hill, June 17, 1775. Abigail took her young son John Quincy to watch the battle from the top of Penn's Hill. From that location, the seven year old boy witnessed the death of family friend Dr. Joseph Warren and many other patriots. The war was not a distant event to the Adamses: instead, John Quincy was ingrained with the virtues and the ideals for which so many men sacrificed their lives before his own eyes. More than just witnessing the event, he was moved by how his mother could be "bred in the *faith* of the deliberate detestation of the War" yet believed in the cause enough to teach him the Ode of Collins, in memory of fallen patriot warriors. By reciting both the Lord's prayer and the poem upon rising every morning, John Quincy was instilled with a sense of both morality and patriotism. The fact that John Quincy remembered this day and recited the ode from memory seventy-two years after the event testified to the impression Abigail left upon her eldest son.[40] She provided him with the desire and means by which to inherit the nation and preserve the principles of his father's generation.

Abigail believed that her sons were not the only ones who merited an education. Even though John provided plenty of advice as to how to raise the boys, he told Abigail that she alone was aware of the "Different Education" their daughter Nabby required.[41] Whereas Abigail declared the need for a better educational system because she thought

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[40] William Lee Miller, *Arguing About Slavery: John Quincy Adams and the Great Battle in the United States Congress* (New York: Vintage Books, 1995), 157-8.
[41] JA to AA, April 15, 1776, *AFC*, I, 384.

her own abilities to be deficient, she believed that daughters should be part of that system and should be raised with the same revolutionary principles and values as sons:

> If we mean to have Heroes, Statesmen and Philosophers, we should have learned women… If much depends as is allowed upon the early Education of youth and the first principals which are instilld take the deepest root, great benefit must arise from litirary accomplishments in women.[42]

Even though Abigail had received her own domestic education wholly from the women of her family, she had the unique opportunity to further her literary knowledge in her father's library. Abigail believed that all of the daughters of the country needed to be intellectually stimulated so as to perpetuate republican ideals through the sons of the nation.

While the education of her children would have fallen within the realm of Abigail's responsibilities regardless of John's presence, her involvement in business and family finances expanded beyond what she previously dealt with. Because John was gone for such long periods of time, Abigail had to find hired help, which was increasingly scarce.[43] While the war effort required more and more soldiers, potential farm hands were lured away with the promise of money for joining the army.[44] Another issue was that of tenants: many people had been driven away from their homes during the British occupation of Boston. Abigail wrote John a flustered letter regarding an issue she had with an existing tenant, Mr. Hayden, who refused to move to a different part of the Adams home to make room for the Trott family. Distraught at the lack of control she had over her own home, she asked John for support. John was outraged at the insolence toward his wife: "I will not endure the least disrespectfull Expression to you. In my

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[42] AA to JA, August 14, 1776, *AFC*, II, 94.
[43] AA to JA, May 4, 1775, *AFC*, I, 193.
[44] AA to JA, August 22, 1777, *AFC*, II, 323.

Absence and in your Situation, it is brutal. I send you a Warning to him to go out of the House immediately."[45] Even though Abigail was the nominal head of the household while John was gone, she still had trouble wielding the full breadth of authority the responsibility sometimes required.

Abigail initially refrained from excessively discussing domestic matters in her letters. She viewed the upkeep of the farm as a burden that she hoped to spare her busy husband. Once John assured Abigail that he longed to hear of his farm and that the thought of working the land was a respite from his political burdens, she more openly relayed information about their domestic affairs.[46] By the end of John's service in the Second Continental Congress, the couple were comparing and commenting upon the inflation of the economy, the prices of common and necessary goods, and the frugality and hardships they faced in surviving day to day life.[47]

Many of the tasks Abigail engaged in were under the guidance of her absent husband. While finding ways to manage the farm, Abigail often had to settle payments for John, usually per his instructions.[48] While Abigail and her children were undergoing a smallpox inoculation in Boston, John requested that she send him two horses for his journey home. Abigail was incapacitated at the moment, unable to arrange anything. She continually asked John to find his own horses in Philadelphia but in the end managed to acquire the necessary resources from friends.[49] Even though John was still in charge of the family, he was unable to physically achieve any of his orders from a distance without Abigail's help.

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[45] AA to JA, July 12, 1775, and JA to AA, July 28, 1775, *AFC*, I, 243-45, 267.
[46] AA to JA, May 14, 1776, *AFC*, I, 407-8.
[47] JA to AA, March 14, 1777, and AA to JA, April 17, 1777, *AFC*, II, 174-75, 212-13.
[48] AA to JA, June 16, 1775, *AFC*, I, 218.
[49] AA to JA, August 12, 1776, *AFC*, II, 87.

Abigail did take the initiative when necessary and to a large degree John trusted her judgment. She strove to avoid putting John in debt—for Abigail's expenditures were contingent upon her husband's name and credit—and searched for any means by which she could obtain the necessary materials and labor within her financial restrictions.[50] After the British retreated from Boston, John sent Abigail to assess the situation of their city home and decide whether to sell or rent the space out. Abigail chose to arrange for the inside to be cleaned—the space had very obviously been occupied in their absence—and eventually found a tenant and negotiated the rent herself.[51] Another issue involving John's transportation appeared when he sent his servant and horse back to Boston. John wanted Abigail to sell the horse but she refused, inferring that she would later need to purchase another when John needed to return home and inflation would make a new horse cost more than she could get by selling then.[52] By this time Abigail was fully ingrained with the foresight and judgment necessary to negotiate both the expected and the unforeseen trials that lay ahead.

Abigail's republican virtues and support of the Revolutionary cause resonate throughout the three years' worth of correspondence with John during the Second Continental Congress. Just as she had taught John Quincy, Abigail expressed her religious convictions intermingled with the republican values upon which the war was based: "God helps them that help themselves… and if we can obtain the divine aid by our own virtue, fortitude and perseverence we may be sure of releaf."[53] She believed that the actions of the revolutionaries and their morally superior goals of justice and equality were

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[50] AA to JA, March 26, 1777, *AFC*, II, 187.
[51] JA to AA, June 16, 1776, AA to JA, September 20, 1776, and AA to JA, March 26, 1777, *AFC*, II, 13, 128, 187.
[52] AA to JA, August 27, 1777, *AFC*, II, 330-31.
[53] AA to JA, September 17, 1775, *AFC*, I, 280.

supported by God. Abigail even questioned the ability of a non-Christian to be considered a "true patriot" because the honor stemming from performing one's duty to God was necessary to ensure that one would perform civil duties toward man.[54] For Abigail, virtue was both the most important justification and the ultimate goal of the entire conflict.

By late 1775, Abigail was already calling for full-fledged independence. She voiced her dissatisfaction with Britain in terms of its deficient morality. At times it appeared that Abigail was less interested in breaking away from Britain because of the specific grievances the revolutionaries listed, but more so because their violation of Christian principles made them unworthy of respect.[55] On the other hand, Abigail put the efforts of the revolutionaries second only to God in importance.[56] At the same time, the realities of the war affected Abigail just as much as the theoretical aspects. She expressed her regret that she could not participate actively in the war: "Were I a man I must be in the Field. I could not live to endure the Thought of my Habitation desolated, my children Butchered, and I an inactive Spectator."[57] When she heard that the Declaration of Independence had finally been signed, Abigail was proud to consider her husband "a principal actor, in laying a foundation for [the country's] future Greatness."[58]

Alongside Abigail's moments of strength and idealism were moments of fragility. Even though she thoroughly supported the revolution and learned to deal with the increasing domestic burdens contingent upon John's absence, Abigail's emotional attachment to her husband was so strong that she never fully adjusted to their separation.

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[54] AA to JA, November 5, 1775, *AFC*, I, 321.
[55] AA to JA, November 12, 1775, *AFC*, I, 324.
[56] AA to JA, May 7, 1776, *AFC*, I, 402.
[57] AA to Mercy Otis Warren, August 14, 1777, *AFC*, II, 314.
[58] AA to JA, July 14, 1776, *AFC*, II, 46.

Following nearly every departure John made for Philadelphia, Abigail experienced a renewed sense of grief and anxiety. She always considered it a patriotic sacrifice she willingly made to her country, but it did not relieve the daily feelings of loss and loneliness. When John left, Abigail wrote letters saying, "I felt very anxious about you tho[ugh] I endeavourd to be very insensible and heroick, yet my heart felt like a heart of Led" and "I find I am obliged to summons all my patriotism to feel willing to part with him again."[59] When John left for his final congressional session at Philadelphia, he expressed increased concern about Abigail because she was pregnant. Her letters to John were relatively calm and composed, but she poured the true extent of her sadness to Mercy:

> How many hundred miles this moment separate us—my heart Bleads at the recollection. Many circumstances conspire to make this Seperation more greivious to me than any which has before taken place. The distance, the difficulty of communication, and the many hazards which my immagination represents as real… render me at times very unhappy. I had it in my Heart to disswade him from going and I know I could have prevaild, but our publick affairs at that time wore so gloomy an aspect that I thought if ever his assistance was wanted, it must be at such a time. I therefore resignd my self to suffer much anxiety and many Melancholy hours for this year to come.[60]

Even in such a vulnerable circumstance, Abigail put the good of the country ahead of her own happiness. Mercy responded by reminding Abigail of the "Heroick Virtue" she shared with wives in ancient Rome who made the same sacrifice.[61] Unhappy though she was, Abigail willingly committed herself to the tides of war.

At certain points during John's absences, Abigail and her family suffered crises that forced her domestic cares to the forefront. In many of these cases, Abigail

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[59] AA to JA, May 4, 1775, and AA to Mercy Otis Warren, August 27, 1775, *AFC*, I, 193, 276.
[60] AA to Mercy Otis Warren, January 1777, *AFC*, II, 150.
[61] Mercy Otis Warren to AA, March 1, 1777, *AFC*, II, 166.

completely abstained from writing of anything involving the war. For instance, the fall of 1775 brought a widespread illness to Boston and surrounding areas, including Braintree. Although none of Abigail's immediate relatives died, many of her neighbors lost loved ones on a daily basis. During this period, Abigail emphasized that her family was her primary concern: "As to politicks I know nothing about them. The distresses of my own family are so great that I have not thought about them."[62] Even though Abigail's priorities were with her family at this point, it is clear that John still put the obligations of the congress first. John claimed he would come home if things got worse, "unless there was an absolute Necessity of my staying here."[63] Interestingly, Abigail appeared to take an extremely minimal break in her interest of the war when she gave birth to a stillborn baby in July 1777. She was incapacitated only for a few days, writing to John five days after the event and resuming full political dialogue in only her second letter to him, less than two weeks later.[64] John actually appeared more concerned than Abigail following the episode. Perhaps Abigail simply did not want to cause more anxiety for John than was necessary, but her ability to emotionally recover from such a delicate hardship so quickly is surprising.

Over the course of John's service in Philadelphia, Abigail appeared to become more accepting of the separation. She expressed her tender sentiments without asking for the date of his return. Abigail wrote more of fondness than of sadness.[65] It is possible that she might have been expecting John to be finished soon and that his political service would end with the conclusion of the Second Continental Congress. Once Abigail found

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[62] AA to JA, September 8, 1775, *AFC*, I, 277.
[63] JA to AA, October 2, 1775, *AFC*, I, 291.
[64] AA to JA, July 16, 1777, and AA to JA, July 23, 1777, *AFC*, II, 282-83, 287-88.
[65] AA to JA, September 10, 1777, *AFC*, II, 340.

out about John's upcoming mission to France, she conveyed different sentiments. In a surprisingly blunt letter, Abigail chided John's fellow delegate James Lovell—with whom she previously had very limited contact—for encouraging John to go. She considered it a "plot against him" and invoked Lovell's own experience with family separation for sympathy:

> How could you so soon forget your sufferings and place your Friend in a more painfull situation… I have often experienced the want of his aid and assistance in the last 3 years of his absence and that Demand increases as our little ones grow up 3 of whom are sons and at this time of life stand most in need of the joint force of his example and precepts. And can I Sir consent to be seperated from him whom my Heart esteems above all earthly things, and for an unlimited time? My life will be one continued scene of anxiety and apprehension, and must I cheerfully comply with the Demand of my Country?[66]

In the end, Abigail apologized for being so forthright and did not stand between John and his patriotic duty.

Abigail's correspondence with John, interaction with male relatives and family friends, proximity to the war, and capacity to understand politics led her to be more than just well-informed: she became capable of making her own educated opinions and critical judgments about the war and the future of America. She dutifully stepped into the traditionally male roles that needed to be filled due to John's absence and taught her children to be virtuous and adhere to the principles for which she sacrificed so much of her happiness. By the end of the Second Continental Congress, Abigail was confident in the responsibilities she was forced to undertake to support her husband's calling and had accepted the fact of their separation. She prided herself in her ability to fulfill the duties of a public figure's wife but felt that her family was, for the most part, fortunate: "My dear friend knows that I could always conform to times and circumstances. As yet I

[66] AA to James Lovell, December 15, 1777, *AFC,* II, 370-71.

know nothing of hardships."[67] Little did Abigail know the worst was yet to come. Even then, she wearily accepted the will of her husband and her country and bore down for the long haul, for as she had known from the beginning, "I know your time is not yours, nor mine."[68]

[67] AA to JA, September 24, 1777, *AFC*, II, 349.
[68] AA to JA, July 5, 1775, *AFC*, I, 239.

Chapter Three

"I asked not my Heart what it could, but what it ought to do"[1]: Exposure to the International Stage, 1778-1788

John Adams stepped onto a ship to leave his native American soil for the first time in his life on February 13, 1778. His trip to Paris to replace one of the three joint commissioners negotiating a treaty of alliance between the United States and France was an exponentially more difficult journey than had been his previous experience to and from Philadelphia.[2] In the first place, John did not arrive in Paris until April 8, nearly two months after he left Boston. Neither John nor Abigail knew what the future held; they only knew that their country called for John's help and they both were prepared to make any sacrifice that was required of them.

For Abigail, this initial period was filled with both difficulties and curiosity. Historian Charles Akers describes Abigail as having just reached maturity: she had finished bearing children, was recently inoculated from smallpox, and had developed intellectually enough to be a companion to her husband, rather than having just a "dutiful

[1] AA to Hannah Quincy Lincoln Storer, February 15, 1778, *AFC*, II, 397.
[2] James Grant, *John Adams: Party of One* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2005), 201.

loyalty" to him.[3] She did not know exactly what to expect as far as her interaction with John, but she knew what it was like to be alone at home. The economy was worse than ever and Abigail had to cut corners in order to maintain her farm and provide for her family in Braintree. At the same time, John's adventure into a new land opened up the prospect for a new wealth of information for Abigail, both culturally and politically.[4] Although left at home, it was the opportunity of a lifetime to experience such new and wonderful things through her husband.

John's mission to Europe was a first in another, very personal regard: Abigail allowed her ten-year-old son, John Quincy, to accompany his father. This was to be the first time that she would be separated from any of her children for an extended period of time. Although Abigail worried for John Quincy's moral stability in the midst of European luxury and extravagance, she admitted that "to exclude him from temptation would be to exclude him from the World in which he is to live, and the only method which can be persued with advantage is to fix the padlock upon the mind."[5] Likewise, Abigail wrote, "The habits of a vigorous mind are formed in contending with difficulties, not in engageing the repose of a pacific station."[6] In consoling Abigail for her sacrifice, John Thaxter echoed the sentiments that justified her allowing John Quincy to go: "I think he is now laying the foundations of a great man."[7] Abigail was left to trust that the virtues that she had instilled in her son were sufficient to safeguard him in the real world and that he was prepared to develop the skills by which he would become a leading figure in the following generation.

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[3] Akers, *Abigail Adams*, 61.
[4] Phyllis Lee Levin, *Abigail Adams: A Biography*, (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1987), 104-5.
[5] AA to John Thaxter, February 15, 1778, *AFC*, II, 391.
[6] AA to Jonathan Mason, August 1778, *AFC*, III, 82.
[7] John Thaxter to AA, March 6, 1778, *AFC*, II, 401.

Abigail's success as a virtuous republican influence was evident immediately upon John Quincy's arrival in France. He wrote to his brother Charles, then only eight years old:

> your buisiness & mine are upon the Same foundation to qualify ourselves to be useful members of Society & to get a living in the world, & I am Convinced from experience that your opportunities for this are as good as mine by the advice of a most excellent mother & the use of a valuable Library.[8]

John Quincy's letters to his younger brothers—which could hardly be considered correspondence, since they were too young to reply—are revealing of how Abigail had raised him to be a "great man." Using the education he was receiving in France and his natural inquisitiveness, John Quincy outlined a bibliography for his brothers to use to effectively learn the French language. Going beyond simple syntax, John Quincy listed the titles of books that covered the philosophy of language and other advanced concepts.[9] After only six months of exposure to Europe and his father's teachings, John Quincy could not have become so intellectually sophisticated at such a young age without the influence of his mother.

Touching once again upon the issue of female education, Abigail asserted the importance of the role women played in raising children worthy of inheriting the legacy of the Founding Fathers. Abigail still phrased her argument in the context of the support women provided for men:

> Why should the Females who have a part to act upon the great Theater, and a part not less important to Society, (as the care of a family and the first instruction of Children falls to their share, and if as we are told that first impressions are most durable), is it not of great importance that those

[8] John Quincy Adams to Charles Adams, June 6, 1778, *AFC*, III, 33. John Quincy Adams will be abbreviated as JQA. Charles Adams will be abbreviated as CA.
[9] JQA to CA and Thomas Boylston Adams, October 3, 1778, *AFC*, III, 102-106. Thomas Boylston Adams will be abbreviated as TBA.

> who are to instill the first principals should be suiteably qualified for the Trust…[10]

After all, Abigail's greatest sacrifice to her country was the men of her family. When she found herself wishing for John's return, Abigail interjected that the men were "sacrificeing the vigor of their days to secure Independence and peace to the rising age."[11] In hoping for better education for women, Abigail continued to argue that it was for the benefit of these men and the sacrifices that both sexes made to the Revolution.

The greatest unforeseen difficulty the Adamses would face during the first European mission was the long delay in overseas correspondence. The circumstances were hardly suitable for conversation and, instead, letters served the basic purpose of assuring the recipient that the sender was still alive. Letters often took half a year to reach their destinations if they survived the trip at all. Ships were regularly captured and private letters were thrown overboard in order to prevent information leaks. Other times ships would be delayed in their departures and letters would sit at ports for months at a time. Postage was expensive and limited the exchange of political and military information.

Abigail's early letters to John reveal that she was wholly unaware of the difficulties to come. She continued to write as if he were only a week's post away, asking for approval to send Charles to live with an uncle in order to attend school.[12] By late September, however, Abigail began to realize that the situation was different this time. Adding to her fears was the long-lasting rumor that Benjamin Franklin, John's

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[10] AA to John Thaxter, February 15, 1778, *AFC*, II, 391.
[11] AA to James Lovell, February, 1779, *AFC*, III, 184.
[12] AA to JA, June 18, 1778, *AFC*, III, 47.

fellow commissioner, had been assassinated in Paris.[13] She did not initially accept her plight, but rather lamented it:

> If I had realized before you left me that the intercourse between us would have been so hazardous, I fear my magninimnity would have faill'd me. Expectation has so long and so often been combatted by dissapointment that I feel myself unhappy, my Spirits which were naturally cheerfull are depressed and the enjoyments of life are growing very insipid to me.

Abigail reached a new level of depression during this period, going as far as to wonder whether John had lost his affection for her.[14] Over time, Abigail became bitter and pessimistic, claiming on one hand that she would not write again until she received a letter from John, and on the other that she would "adopt the very concise method of my Friend—and as I wish to do every thing agreable to him, send him Billits containing not more than a dozen lines at the utmost."[15]

If Abigail was unjustly upset, John's response was unduly harsh. At first, John appeared surprised at Abigail's complaints. He was saddened that Abigail would think he had intentionally neglected her and urged her to believe that she was still "all that is dear to me in this World."[16] Because of the delay in communication, Abigail did not receive this letter until February, after which she recognized her folly and displayed a renewed sense of optimism.[17] Yet John continued to receive her older letters begging him to write more, claiming he had forgotten her, and bitterly complaining that, when John did write, he did not write enough. John, for his part, was consumed by his work in Paris and knew, moreover, that most of his letters were in danger of being intercepted by the enemy. John reminded Abigail about two letters he wrote from Philadelphia in July

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[13] AA to James Lovell, March 1, 1778, *AFC*, II, 396.
[14] AA to JA, September 29, 1778, *AFC*, III, 94-95.
[15] AA to JA, January 2, 1779, *AFC*, III, 147.
[16] JA to AA, December 2, 1778, *AFC*, III, 124.
[17] AA to JA, February 13, 1779, *AFC*, III, 167.

1775 that were captured and published in both Massachusetts and British newspapers.[18] Although John recalled his intercepted letter to Abigail as being one of his "Love Letters," it actually contained little real emotional—or political, for that matter—substance. Instead, it was the other letter, addressed to James Warren, which caused problems for John. In it, he criticized an unnamed (although easily distinguishable by contemporaries) fellow delegate.[19] It was precisely this type of scandal John wished to avoid, for if his letters could be intercepted on American soil, the entire Atlantic Ocean certainly posed greater danger.

In the meantime, John began a downward spiral, writing increasingly angry letters as he received more and more delayed complaints from Abigail. John revealed to Abigail that he wrote several drafts before being able to send her a letter because "one was angry, another was full of Greif, and the third with Melancholy, so that I burnt them all." He also threatened to stop writing altogether if Abigail continued to complain.[20] John began describing in detail places he saw and people he met, as Abigail requested, and then asked her if she felt better off for having wasted his time by making him write about such trivial topics, insisting that he had "Things to do of more importance." He seemed to regret the equality and openness with which he previously treated his wife. In one pointed missive, he cautioned: "Let me alone, and have my own Way. You know that I shall not injure you and you ought to believe that I have good Reasons, for what I do, and not treat me so roughly."[21] The lowest blow came when John questioned Abigail's intentions for wanting more information about the royal courts of France, claiming, "You

[18] JA to AA, January 18, 1779, *AFC*, III, 149-50.
[19] JA to AA, July 24, 1775, *AFC*, I, 255-58. See editor's note 1.
[20] JA to AA, December 18, 1778, *AFC*, III, 138.
[21] JA to AA, February 26, 1779, *AFC*, III, 179.

want me to unravel to you all the Mysteries of the Politicks of Europe, and all the Intrigues of Courts. This would make Madam a Lady of Consequence no doubt and enable her to shine in a Circle of Politicians of either sex."[22] John asserted he did not understand the "Intrigues of Courts" and would not write about them even if he did because he would be justly humiliated and attributed with harboring an interest in lavishness and extravagance, amidst his claims of republican virtue. By calling Abigail "your Ladyship," John hinted at his disappointment that his wife would strive to act above her class when she claimed to be virtuous as well. Even John Quincy recognized how hurt his father was and suggested that Abigail stop sending such painful letters.[23] Whereas Abigail feared for the well-being of her husband and son, the difficulty of overseas communication led to hostility the likes of which does not appear elsewhere in a lifetime of correspondence.

The majority of the letters written between the scattered members of the Adams family during John's first stint abroad focused on the hardships of separation rather than any political or economic discussions. One of Abigail's remaining connections to Philadelphia was John Thaxter.[24] Although just a secretary, Thaxter offered whatever information he could. He sometimes exhibited less discretion in his communications than perhaps an active delegate would have. Because he was privy to only bits and pieces of political information, Thaxter served more as someone for Abigail to watch out for in the absence of two of the men she previous expended her maternal energies upon. John appears to have instructed Thaxter to write to Abigail, perhaps to fill both of these

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[22] JA to AA, February 1779, *AFC*, III, 183.
[23] JQA to AA, February 20, 1779, *AFC*, III, 176.
[24] John Thaxter, Jr. was a cousin of Abigail's and worked as a clerk at John's law office. He graduated from Harvard in 1774 and served as a secretary to Congress in 1778 and accompanied John Adams on his second diplomatic mission to Europe in 1779. Butterfield, *AFC*, I, 142, see note 4.

roles.[25] Although she occasionally made use of Thaxter as an outlet for her domestic issues, he was only in his mid-twenties and she was more interested in inquiring about his love life.[26] Marriage during this period, asserts historian Jan Lewis, became "the very pattern from which the cloth of republican society was to be cut."[27] If Thaxter remained a bachelor, he had no wife to keep him on a virtuous path. In the meantime, Abigail both served this function for him but also treated him as a son, attempting to convince him of the importance of marriage and ensure that he maintained republican ideals in order to be useful to his country.

To fill her more mature and substantial needs, Abigail turned to what scholars have found to be a curious relationship with James Lovell.[28] Conducted initially between almost total strangers, Lovell's letters were filled with lofty compliments and flirtations, but some historians have given apologetic excuses for Abigail's own continuation of the connection for five years.[29] Lovell initiated the correspondence when, hearing about Abigail's interest in the war from John, he sent her a map of the area between the Chesapeake Bay and Delaware River so that she could follow along with the latest war developments in that area.[30] As was discussed in the previous chapter, Abigail's distress at the news of John's appointment to Europe (and Lovell's involvement and encouragement in John's appointment) led her to write a surprisingly candid letter to the

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[25] John Thaxter to JA, April 30, 1778, *AFC*, III, 17.
[26] AA to John Thaxter, April 9, 1778, and AA to John Thaxter, July 23, 1778, *AFC*, III, 5-7, 64.
[27] Jan Lewis, "The Republican Wife: Virtue and Seduction in the Early Republic," *The William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd Ser., Vol. 44, No. 4. (Oct., 1987): 689.
[28] James Lovell was a Harvard graduate and Boston schoolteacher before the outbreak of the American Revolution. During the British siege of Boston, he stayed in the city and acted as an informant for the colonists, which landed him in jail. After his release, Lovell was elected as one of the Massachusetts delegates to the First Continental Congress, along with John Adams. He served the "longest uninterrupted tenure of any delegate." During John's overseas missions, Lovell was the secretary of the Committee on Foreign Affairs. Gelles, *Portia*, 60.
[29] Ibid., 64.
[30] James Lovell to AA, August 29, 1777, *AFC*, II, 333.

stranger. Such personal expressions were generally reserved for only her most intimate correspondents.[31]

Although Abigail displayed shock at Lovell's overly affectionate addresses, she maintained a correspondence with him during John's absence for a number of reasons. She occasionally needed to express her sorrow at the absence of her family members and searched for understanding from Lovell, who had likewise left his family behind. When he overstepped the acceptable bounds of conversation, Abigail sometimes scolded Lovell, yet kept writing. This was because Lovell was her only real connection to Philadelphia and her only prospect of information, both about her husband and the latest political news: "Tell him I have a large share of Grandmother Eves curiosity and have had a very indulgent partner, but being deprived of him I claim some small right of knowledge from others."[32] To say that Abigail did not somewhat enjoy the compliments in the absence of her "dearest friend" would undermine the complexity of her relationship with Lovell. It would likewise be difficult to suggest that Abigail harbored any legitimately unfaithful intentions. Instead, the correspondence between Abigail and Lovell can be understood as a give and take relationship, in which Abigail relied on Lovell for information and friendship and Lovell was interested in the conversation of such a politically intelligent woman, whom he highly respected.

Her correspondence with Lovell was not the only development in Abigail's growing comfort through letters. While in France, John got into a discussion with a prominent French woman, Marie Grand, claiming Americans believed it was "the Duty

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[31] Gelles, *Portia*, 58.
[32] AA to John Thaxter, February 15, 1778, *AFC*, II, 392.
AA to James Lovell, June 12, 1778, AA to James Lovell, June 24, 1778, and AA to James Lovell, January 4, 1779, *AFC*, III, 41, 48, 147; Gelles, *Portia*, 62, 63.

of a good Citizen to sacrifice all to his Country." Grand wondered that men would include their families in that sacrifice, but John assured her that Abigail shared in his beliefs. Grand could not believe that Abigail felt the same degree of dedication that John professed and determined to hear it straight from Abigail's pen. John encouraged Abigail to write to Grand, revealing his confidence in Abigail's devotion to her republican ideals. Regrettably, both Grand's letter and Abigail's response have not been found. It is clear, however, that Abigail's letter was translated into French and somewhat circulated in the outskirts of Paris and earned a favorable response, even from John.[33] The praise she received was not because of her role as the wife of a diplomat, but because of the power of her own revolutionary rhetoric. Abigail finally discovered a voice outside her family that garnered respect for herself.

Even without John's consent or request, Abigail also began addressing politicians with whom she was not familiar to voice her opinion or question policies. The controversy over Silas Deane, the commissioner to France in 1776-77 who was recalled after being accused of making false promises (and was replaced by John Adams in the negotiations), incited strong feelings from many people. Abigail, without any prior discussion with John, took the liberty to write to an unidentified Massachusetts delegate at the Continental Congress about the issue. She admitted that the ordeal likely caused "more extensive mischief than perhaps [Deane] first intended," but Abigail asserted that open quarrels between officials reflected poorly on the fledgling government on the international scene. She also professed that virtue and morality were required of the nation's statesmen and benefited the country as a whole. If the governing body appeared

[33] JA to AA, September 23, 1778, AA to Abigail Adams 2d, February 11, 1779, John Thaxter to AA, February 16, 1780, and JA to AA, February 27, 1780, *AFC*, III, 91-92, 162, 278, 286. See editor's note 1 and 3 on 92. Abigail Adams 2d will be abbreviated as AA2.

disreputable, whether it actually was or not, Abigail proclaimed that its power would automatically be damaged to some extent. Because of the unconventionality of Abigail's letter, she apologized profusely if she had offended the recipient by stepping beyond her bounds by "touching upon a subject more properly belonging to your sex." Abigail defended herself, however, by asserting that "I thought it my duty to apply to those capable of applying a spedy antidote." When she became more daring in expressing her opinions, Abigail maintained that it was her responsibility as an American. She furthered her claim that she justly wrote as a citizen of the United States: "the critical state of our country… requires the Eyes of Argos[34] to watch for its safety and security…"[35] Abigail was no longer just a woman in the background of a male Revolution: she took an active role in preserving the nation for which she sacrificed her life.

When John and John Quincy finally returned home in August, 1779, the excitement of the reunion was short-lived. John spent much of his time—occasionally away from home in Boston itself—drafting the beginnings of what would become the Massachusetts Constitution. His participation in this endeavor, however, was interrupted when he was given a new assignment—once again to Europe—and preparations for the trip began almost immediately. Only four months passed from the day John arrived home till the day he set sail again. Abigail not only lost her husband to another European mission; she hardly held his attention while he was home. Despite painful the prospect of so soon a separation, both John and Abigail were better prepared for the difficulties of overseas communication and once again yielded their hearts to the demands of their country.

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[34] Argos, also spelled Argus, was a being from Greek mythology that had one hundred eyes covering his body. He was employed by Hera as a watchman.
[35] AA to a Massachusetts Member of the Continental Congress, January 1779, *AFC*, III, 157-8.

Abigail's experience with John's first mission abroad vastly altered her actions and reactions during the second trip. Instead of worrying incessantly about John Quincy's absence, Abigail actually encouraged him to accompany his father again. She believed that the trip was in the best interest of his future regardless of his own hesitation and even allowed the fragile nine-year-old Charles to go as well. She lectured John Quincy about the significance of the era in which they lived and the opportunities that came with it, echoing the reasons she gave for allowing him to leave the first time:

> These are times in which a Genious would wish to live. It is not in the still calm of life, or the repose of a pacific station, that great characters are formed… The Habits of a vigorous mind are formed in contending with difficulties… Great necessities call out great virtues. When a mind is raised, and animated by scenes that engage the Heart, then those qualities which would otherways lay dormant, wake into Life, and form the Character of the Hero and the Statesman… It is your Lot my Son to be an Eye witness of [War, Tyrrany and Desolation] in your own Native land, and at the same time to owe your existence among a people who have made a glorious defense of their invaded Liberties, and who, aided by a generous and powerfull Ally, with the blessing of heaven will transmit this inheritance to ages yet unborn.[36]

Abigail advocated action. She undoubtedly would have been more comfortable with her children at home under her care but the experience her sons could gain abroad would better prepare them for the kind of life that the country would demand of its leaders. In the wake of the Revolution, Abigail believed that a new generation would need to be prepared to take the reins and perpetuate the ideals for which her contemporaries fought and died.

Abigail commented on her children's character flaws in order to make them wary of the dangers each vice could present. She warned John Quincy of his quick temper but suggested that he redirect that passion into something useful. On the other hand, Charles

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[36] AA to JQA, January 19, 1780, *AFC*, III, 268-9.

had always been an instant favorite with everyone he met and Abigail warned him of letting it go to his head: "If you ever feel your Little Bosom swell with pride and begin to think yourself better than others; you will then become less worthy, and loose those Qualities which now make you valuable."[37] Abigail's straightforward approach to her children had a twofold purpose which embodied her beliefs as to the greatest goals anyone could achieve in life: "Having once obtained this self goverment you will find a foundation laid for happiness to yourself and usefullness to Mankind."[38]

Abigail's prior experience in parting from her family did not leave the latest separation without its anxieties. She was, however, far more calm and levelheaded in her letters to John. The rift created by the painful letters sent from both directions of the Atlantic was something that neither Abigail nor John could survive again. Instead, Abigail resumed her capitulation to their respective duties and wrote "I am inured, but not hardened to the painfull portion."[39] Abigail also found new support in the form of Elizabeth Ellery Dana, whose husband Francis had accompanied John to Europe. She finally had a companion who truly understood the extent of the sacrifice she made: "we talked as much as we pleased of our dear Absents, compared Notes, Sympathized, Responded to each other, and mingled with our sacrifices some little pride that no Country could boast two worthyer Hearts than we had permitted to go abroad."[40] Almost a year after the party's departure, Abigail was emotionally composed enough to no longer need support from her old friend Mercy.[41]

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[37] AA to JA, March 1, 1780, *AFC*, III, 292-3; AA to CA, May 26, 1781, *AFC*, IV, 135.
[38] AA to JQA, March 20, 1780, *AFC*, III, 312.
[39] AA to JA, July 16, 1780, *AFC*, III, 377.
[40] AA to JA, October 8, 1780, *AFC*, IV, 3.
[41] Mercy Otis Warren to AA, October 20, 1780, *AFC*, IV, 11.

At this point, Abigail began to view republicanism as being dependent upon the efforts of women. As always, Abigail framed her understanding of women in the prescribed social roles of the late eighteenth century. Even though Abigail lived in and ran their Braintree home without John for the majority of the past five years, she still claimed that she lived upon her *husband's* farm.[42] She likewise accepted the fact that she could not vote on the adoption of the Massachusetts Constitution but would instead "be a writer of votes."[43] She recognized the influence she wielded even if her name could not be on a ballot. Yet Abigail went further than simply claiming that women had a role in the revolutionary effort; she asserted that the success of the nation depended upon women:

> Yet virtue exists, and publick spirit lives—lives in the Bosoms of the Fair Daughters of America, who… unite their Efforts to reward the patriotick, to stimulate the Brave, to alleviate the burden of war, and to shew that they are not dismayed by defeats or misfortunes… America will not wear chains while her daughters are virtuous, but corrupt their morals by a general depravity, and believe me sir a state or nation is undone.[44]

Along with pointing out women's strengths, Abigail admitted their weaknesses. She once again called upon men to fulfill their duties toward their wives by protecting them from the hazards outside the home. Women represented stability and perseverance but it was a two-way relationship in which they still relied upon men.

Abigail later complained about the restrictions upon women, much like her "Remember the Ladies" letter, but once again did not expect or ask for drastic changes. She protested that women had no property rights, political voices, and were ineligible for governmental offices, but rather than becoming "indifferent to the publick Welfare,"

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[42] AA to James Lovell, December 27, 1779, *AFC*, III, 254.
[43] AA to JA, July 5, 1780, *AFC*, III, 372.
[44] AA to John Thaxter, July 21, 1780, *AFC*, III, 378.

> all History and every age exhibit Instances of patriotick virtue in the female Sex; which considering our situation equals the most Heroick of yours. "A late writer observes that as Citizens we are calld upon to exhibit our fortitude, for when you offer your Blood to the State, it is ours. In giving it our Sons and Husbands we give more than ourselves. You can only die on the field of Battle, but we have the misfortune to survive those whom we Love most."[45]

Once again, Abigail did not point out these observations in order to change or even condemn the injustices of the gendered social system; she simply called for the recognition that she believed women deserved for their role in the war effort. Abigail likewise did not need to wait for John's approval: "I will take praise to myself. I feel that it is my due, for having sacrificed so large a portion of my peace and happiness to promote the welfare of my country."[46]

Abigail occasionally struggled with reconciling her political beliefs to the realities of forming a new governmental institution. She had specific ideas about what the country should be and the virtues it should be founded upon but the actions—or inactions—of the men often disappointed her. Historian Ruth H. Bloch argues that early American men and women possessed two different types of virtue; while women maintained "private, Christian virtues," male virtue was public and civic.[47] Women, however, could influence men and make sure they maintained their civic virtue. Abigail did just that when she criticized the disorganization of Congress and demanded "an Energetick force that will draw forth our resources, put them in motion with vigor and lead on decisively."[48] At the same time, the lack of widespread proper republican virtues

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[45] AA to JA, June 17, 1782, *AFC*, IV, 328.
[46] Ibid.
[47] Ruth H. Bloch, "The Gendered Meanings of Virtue in Revolutionary America," *Signs*, Vol. 13, No. 1, (Autumn, 1987): 42.
[48] AA to John Thaxter, July 21, 1780, *AFC*¸ III, 378.

frustrated Abigail to the point of claiming, "I am Sick Sick of politicks."[49] She feared the influence of European extravagance and believed that the United States had the best chance to "make 'Men happy and keep them So.'"[50] Abigail's hopes outweighed her disappointments and she continued to support her country while she waited for the men to act their part, both in the government and in day-to-day life.

Abigail's growing republican ideology went hand in hand with the increasing liberty she took in letter-writing. She addressed yet another member of Congress to dispute what she considered questionable behavior. Abigail initiated a correspondence with Congressional delegate Elbridge Gerry regarding what she perceived as a snub toward John. A Pennsylvania newspaper noted the election of several leading men to the American Philosophical Society, referring to them with the utmost reverence for their official positions, past and present. John, however, was labeled only as "late Member of Congress," without any mention of his current service in Europe. Abigail inquired about the difference in recognition not only because she had a vested interest in John's honor (since he deserved the same recognition for his services that Abigail herself demanded), but also because the titles given to the ministers sent to Europe were necessary in order for the new nation's ambassadors to be treated with respect. Abigail lectured Gerry about the importance of recognizing how the ministers of a fledgling nation would be received abroad and told him that they needed as much support as possible.[51]

Gerry did not appear to take Abigail's complaint too seriously. He did acknowledge the problem of undermining the power of the American diplomats and

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[49] AA to James Lovell, September 17, 1780, *AFC*, III, 415.
[50] AA to Mercy Otis Warren, February 12, 1783, and AA to John Thaxter, October 20, 1783, *AFC*, IV, 95, 262.
[51] AA to Elbridge Gerry, March 13, 1780, *AFC*, III, 297-300. See editor's note 2.

promised to inquire into the lack of John's proper title, but in reality did very little.[52] Even though it may appear that Abigail was fixated on semantics, John did experience problems trying to provide himself with basic services without a respectable title to reflect his importance.[53] Abigail lamented the lack of understanding and appreciation in Philadelphia for the trials that the ministers went through in Europe. In the process, however, Abigail took the woman's role of the honorable guardian and applied it outside of her immediate family: she saw it as her duty to protect the wellbeing of the country itself.

Gerry was not the only member of Congress that Abigail lectured. Tensions between some of the ministers abroad led to some controversial letters, which were sent back to the United States. Alice Lee Shippen was the sister of Arthur Lee, the envoy to France who was involved in the Silas Deane dispute previously mentioned. Abigail mistakenly received a letter from Shippen meant for Elizabeth Welles Adams, the wife of Samuel Adams. In this letter, Shippen wrote critically about the actions of Benjamin Franklin and mentioned that he was "blackening the Character of Mr. J:A. to Congress." Shippen had reason to be spiteful because Franklin had done the same to her own brother, effecting his recall from France. Abigail politely forwarded the letter to its intended recipient but took the liberty to write to Shippen to clarify her own understanding of the situation.[54]

Now that she had a reason to distrust Franklin, whom she had previously lauded, Abigail criticized the decision of Congress to unite Franklin and her husband in the

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[52] Elbridge Gerry to AA, April 17, 1780, and Elbrige Gerry to AA, May 16, 1780, *AFC*, III, 323-5, 350.
[53] AA to Elbridge Gerry, March 13, 1780, *AFC*, III, 300. See editor's note 8.
[54] Alice Lee Shippen to Elizabeth Welles Adams, June 17, 1781 and AA to Alice Lee Shippen, June 30, 1781, *AFC*, IV, 154, 167-8.

mission to negotiate peace and commercial treaties with Great Britain. John had initially been the only minister who was granted powers to conduct such negotiations but his individual powers were revoked in favor of a joint commission. Surely Abigail wondered why John's powers had been revoked and was also offended by Franklin's remarks, but she took it one step further and wrote to Lovell that "You most assuredly have a party who do not mean the best welfare of their country by this movement." After taking a few weeks to calm down, Abigail resumed her letter: "I will tell you Sir the consequence of the late movements… [John] will have no part in executing orders dishonorary to his country. One path is plain before him. He can and he will resign his commission."[55] Even though Abigail felt a degree of freedom in addressing Lovell because of their existing correspondence, she went as far as to threaten that Congress would lose John's services altogether. John did not follow through with a resignation just yet—after all, it was Abigail who made the threat—but he often echoed his wife's sentiments.

Abigail's extended separation from John highlighted her own personal virtues and respect. Without physically being in the shadow of her husband, Abigail's conduct reflected more upon herself, even though she continually cited John's happiness as the reason for her actions. Abigail wrote a letter to Winslow Warren, a son of Mercy Otis Warren, who was about to embark on a voyage to Europe, and she was met with a favorable response: "To you it may suffice to say I think such a Letter from a Lady, and a Lady so Very Capable of dictating to a Youth as Mrs. Adams would stimulate the Most Depraved to the path of Virtue and Honor."[56] For a more tangible use of Abigail's regard, Charles Storer—one of John's old law clerks who also served as his secretary

[55] AA to James Lovell, July 20-August 6, 1781, *AFC*, IV, 184-5.
[56] Winslow Warren to AA, May 26, 1780, *AFC*, III, 358.

overseas—sent a letter to his father under cover of a letter to Abigail. He asked her to forward the letter for him because "it will go more expeditiously as well as safely—to your Excellency—than by itself, and presuming upon your goodness to excuse it."[57] Interestingly, a man who had equal exposure to both Abigail and John also recognized the distinction that the former deserved. Abigail's continuing overseas correspondent, John Thaxter (who accompanied John on his second mission to Europe), informed her that "Your Counterpart (I dont say your better half) has written you several ways…"[58] Whether or not this was the type of recognition Abigail wanted for her services and sacrifices in the war effort, it is clear that she was of equal importance as her husband in their marriage and became an important figure in her own right.

Maintaining the family's business and finances was old news to Abigail. During this period she branched out and began purchasing land in preparation for John's return. Abigail's main interest was in several plots in Vermont. The benefits of this purchase, she believed, were twofold: it would provide a place for John and herself to take a vacation and get away from the world, and also would give her children land to settle upon once they were older.[59] Abigail was so devoted to her Vermont purchase that, trying to settle the bill for Charles's solo return home from Europe, she preferred to ask John for more money rather than give up her land.[60] Abigail made the final purchase in July 1782, without John's approval.[61] She also added directly to their Braintree property,

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[57] Charles Storer to AA, November 8, 1782, *The Adams Papers: Adams Family Correspondence*, ed. By Richard Alan Ryerson, et al., 2 vols. (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1993), V, 30. Despite the change in editors, these volumes are a continuing part of the series and will also be referred to as *AFC*.
[58] John Thaxter to AA, December 15, 1782, *AFC*, V, 49.
[59] AA to JA, December 9, 1781, *AFC*, IV, 257; AA to JA, October 25, 1782, *AFC*, V, 23.
[60] AA to JA, March 25, 1782, *AFC*, IV, 295.
[61] AA to JA, July 18, 1782, *AFC*, IV, 345; JA to AA, October 12, 1782, *AFC*, V, 15-16. See editor's note 6.

a purchase that gave John "more pleasure than you are aware."[62] Whether or not John supported Abigail in her purchases, she was on her own and made the most informed decisions she could.

During this period, Abigail did find herself in charge of an affair that she had never before encountered. In late 1782, Royall Tyler began courting the Adamses' oldest child and only daughter, Nabby. Tyler's efforts quickly won Abigail over, even before her daughter. She was reminded of the "Love I bore to the object of my early affections" and found it difficult "to forbid him hope."[63] For what appears to be the first time in his absence, John became enormously engrossed in his daughter's life. He likely realized the effect her marriage would have on the reputation of his family in general, but voiced his concerns in the frame of what his daughter deserved herself, which he believed was more than "any, even reformed Rake." John especially disliked the fact that he had no direct involvement in the matter and decried "this method of Courting Mothers."[64] From the time he received Abigail's letter concerning the courtship in January, 1783 to the time he was reunited with his wife and daughter a year and a half later, John was immensely apprehensive about the outcome of the courtship. In the end, Abigail decided to wait for John's approval before allowing the courtship to go any further. Her daughter, after all, was more precious than any land purchase. In the meantime, Abigail tried to give Tyler advice as to maintaining a virtuous character in order to be deemed suitable for Nabby.[65]

The major disruption in Tyler's efforts to wed the Adamses' daughter was nothing less than Abigail and Nabby's own journey to Europe. Abigail's first notable distress

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[62] AA to JA, May 7, 1783 and JA to AA, August 14, 1783, *AFC*, V, 153, 222.
[63] AA to JA, December 23, 1782, *AFC*, V, 55-7.
[64] JA to AA, January 22, 1783, *AFC*, V, 75.
[65] AA to Royall Tyler, June 14, 1783, *AFC*, V, 174.

regarding John's latest mission came after the return of her son Charles in early 1782. Abigail had not known about Charles's illness and homesickness, or even his plans to return home alone, until he was already on his way.[66] She found out—through no help from her friends, who purposely hid the truth from her—that John had suffered a severe fever in the fall of 1781 at Amsterdam. Once Abigail finally found out, she begged his return.[67] Soon after this, John became fed up with his situation and determined "I must go to you or you must come to me. I cannot live, in this horrid Solitude."[68] As soon as Abigail heard this, she was eager to rejoin her husband and take care of him, despite the dangers of the voyage: "Remember that to render your situation more agreable I fear neither the Enemy or old Neptune." At the same time, Abigail admitted that the reality of an overseas voyage was not altogether too pleasing an idea.[69] Still, her desperation overpowered her initial fears and she begged, "May I? Will you let me try to soften, if I cannot wholy releave you, from your Burden of Cares and perplexities?"[70] Once John realized that Abigail seriously considered making the trip, he also had second thoughts. His fear for Abigail, along with his need to see his family, led him to officially resign his positions in Europe. Even though Congress never accepted John's resignation and did not consent to his return, this gesture is revealing as to the misery he experienced after three full years without his wife.

Back in Braintree, Abigail began to make arrangements for her departure. She sent her sons Charles and Thomas to live with her younger sister, Elizabeth, and to

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[66] AA to JA, September 29, 1781, *AFC*, IV, 220.
[67] JA to AA, October 9, 1781 and AA to JA, March 25, 1782, *AFC*, IV, 225-6, 294.
[68] JA to AA, May 14, 1782, *AFC*, IV, 323.
[69] AA to JA, September 5, 1782, *AFC*, IV, 377.
[70] AA to JA, October 8, 1782, *AFC*, V, 5.

receive their educations from Elizabeth's husband John.[71] Additionally, Abigail had figured out what she needed to do with her home in order to be able to leave for an extended period of time. She had plenty of family members who could look after the Adamses' property and even chose to give John's legal account books to Tyler.[72] While the latter may not have been a wise decision in the long run (Cotton Tufts[73] later went through great pains to get the books back), Abigail was on her own as to preparing for her departure.

Abigail retained some reservations about her trip as it approached. She worried that her humble lifestyle made her unsuitable for the extravagance and formality of French courts.[74] More importantly, Abigail realized she would be traveling without her husband.[75] She had commented before that she would have loved to travel if she were a man, but she was deeply ingrained with her idea of what was and was not proper for women to do. Regardless of what she would have done as a man, the fact remained that Abigail was a woman bound by the dictates of the female sphere. For someone who had never ventured outside her colony or, subsequently, state, a journey across the ocean was a considerable step. To do so without the protection of a male relative made it even more difficult to digest. Either way, Abigail made a few last minute arrangements with Tufts and began her trip with only her daughter and two servants by her side.[76]

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[71] Elizabeth Shaw to AA and MC, March 15, 1783, *AFC*, V, 105; AA to JA, April 7, 1783, *AFC*, V, 118.
[72] AA To JA, January 3, 1784, *AFC*, V, 292.
[73] Cotton Tufts was Abigail's cousin and, by marriage, her uncle. He was a well known physician and resided in Weymouth. Tufts often helped the Adamses with financial matters, made inquiries and conducted business during their absences, took care of their children, and maintained a rich correspondence with both Abigail and John. *AFC*, I, 14. See editor's note 1; Cotton Tufts to AA, January 5, 1786, *The Adams Papers: Adams Family Correspondence*, ed. C. James Taylor, et al., 1 vol. (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2005), VII, 5.
[74] AA to JA, December 15, 1783, *AFC*, V, 280.
[75] AA to JA, February 11, 1784, *AFC*, V, 303.
[76] AA to Cotton Tufts, June 18, 1784, *AFC*, V, 345. See also xxix.

From the moment of Abigail's departure, the nature of her letters changed. She now had a generally new set of correspondents, made up chiefly of the women of her family. Very few letters were written between Abigail and John since they were so rarely separated while in Europe. Abigail spent a large portion of her correspondence relaying her observations rather than her political insights. She wrote character descriptions of the people she met, described the scenery around her, commented on curious social conventions, and continually compared Europe to the United States.[77] Abigail did discuss politics with some of her male correspondents, namely Tufts, Thaxter, and John Quincy (once the latter two returned to the United States). Much of this was because John was too busy to write himself and Abigail did so in his stead. At the same time, Abigail was once again an insider and could provide valuable information directly to her American counterparts.[78] Interestingly, Abigail essentially abandoned two of her previously major correspondents. During her four years in Europe, she did not write a single letter to James Lovell and rarely wrote to Mercy Otis Warren.

Thousands of miles away from home, Abigail found herself performing many of the same duties she did in Braintree. Even though she was with John, he was busy with his political duties and writings, so Abigail maintained the finances and dealt with furnishing the homes in which they lived. The Adamses employed several servants but Abigail was still in charge of the domestic realm.[79] She also continued to arrange for her home and children as certain changes necessitated adjusted directions.[80] Additionally, the Adamses moved from outside of Paris to London, which forced Abigail to start all

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[77] AA to Mary Cranch, July 6-July 30, 1784, *AFC*, V, 358-383.
[78] AA to John Thaxter, March 20, 1785, and John Thaxter to AA, June 4, 1785, *AFC*, VI, 80, 166; AA to Cotton Tufts, October 10, 1786, *AFC*, VII, 363.
[79] AA to Mary Cranch, September 5, 1784, *AFC*, V, 440-1.
[80] AA to Cotton Tufts, January 3, 1785 and AA to Cotton Tufts, March 8, 1785, *AFC*, VI, 41-2, 76-7.

over again in a completely different country. Abigail continued to be in charge of running the household as John was still focused on his duties in the public sphere.

Despite Abigail's involvement in the business of running her home, she still had more than enough resources by which to develop her republican ideals. The war between the United States and Great Britain had officially ended just months before Abigail sailed for London. She was exposed to the aftermath of the war and the process of developing the international recognition that the new country needed to establish. She witnessed how several European countries treated Americans and also kept up to speed with how Americans were acting themselves. Abigail's new perspective allowed her to look critically at her fellow countrymen and develop ideas as to what changes needed to be made.

Abigail retained the same set of republican virtues that she professed during the war. As far as the role of women, Abigail had always called for better education and the recognition of women's intelligence, but her exposure to certain educated French women perhaps redefined Abigail's beliefs. Benjamin Franklin introduced Abigail to Madame Helvétius, a woman he described as "a genuine French Woman, wholy free from affectation or stifness of behaviour and one of the best women in the world." Abigail, however, was "greatly astonished" at Helvétius's conduct, citing her "jaunty air," "spreading her Arms upon the Backs of [Franklin's and John's] Chairs," and cleaning up her dog's urine with her own dress. Abigail was so appalled at Helvétius's behavior that she was "highly disgusted and never wish for an acquaintance with any Ladies of this cast."[81] If this was the product of liberal freedom in France, Abigail wanted nothing to do with it. She instead wanted women's intelligence to be used for the maintenance of

[81] AA to Lucy Cranch, September 5, 1784, *AFC,* V, 436-37.

private virtue and the republican responsibility to benefit the nation, rather than the complete disintegration of manners and morality. It was perhaps for this reason that Abigail did not advocate total legal and political freedom for women, but instead maintained a conservative view on their roles in society.

Abigail also had opinions about men's civic virtue back in the United States. She believed that every man needed to work hard in order to maintain the freedom that so many had fought to attain, and any person who "is not in some way or other usefull to Society, is a drone in the Hive, and ought to be Hunted down accordingly."[82] Abigail's seemingly militant stance stemmed from her belief that "it lies wholy with our Country to determine whether they will be a respected or a despiced Nation."[83] If Americans could not work together and abandoned their virtues, then there was little hope that they would remain a unified nation, let alone succeed on the international level. Abigail criticized the men involved in Shay's Rebellion in her home state, citing their love of luxury for their financial woes.[84] The common man, she commented, was engrossed in reprinting the defamation of American ministers written in British papers and she was "sorry to see our publick Papers so nearly allied to those of Britain. Liberty ought not to become licentiousness."[85] It was precisely this introspective analysis Abigail undertook that made her realize that there were no longer any external obstacles preventing the United States from flourishing.

With this realization, Abigail looked toward Congress. She had for years known the problems foreign ministers faced with long periods of indecision and inadequate

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[82] AA to Mary Cranch, May 21, 1786, *AFC*, VII, 178.
[83] AA to Cotton Tufts, February 21, 1786, *AFC*, VII, 73.
[84] AA to Thomas Jefferson, January 29, 1787, *AFC*, VII, 455.
[85] AA to Thomas Welsh, July 22, 1786, *AFC*, VII, 282.

financial backing. The Adamses' financial situation was even worse once John Quincy returned home from his second trip to Europe and all three of the Adams boys entered Harvard College within a year.[86] On one hand, Abigail blamed Congress itself for being lax in its foreign affairs: "Congress have done in regard to [the Barbary States] as they have with most of there other foreign affairs, delay'd and neglected them."[87] Alternately, she professed that the people did not allow Congress "those powers which would enable them to act in concert, and give vigor and strength to their proceedings."[88] After recognizing both sides of the problem, Abigail concluded that the United States needed a stronger central government in order to benefit the country as a whole. If her husband was going to successfully negotiate any treaties, he needed the proper backing before he could put his country into an acceptable position, both politically and commercially.

Once Abigail and John left France for London—John served as the first American Minister to Great Britain—Abigail found a new correspondent in Thomas Jefferson.[89] Abigail ended her first letter to him by apologizing "for thus freely scribling to you. I will not deny that there may be a little vanity in the hope of being honourd with a line from you."[90] Jefferson eagerly responded, thanking Abigail "for your condescension in having taken the first step for settling a correspondence which I so much desired." Even though Jefferson credited Abigail with initiating the correspondence, he proposed that they "remove obstacles" and form an honest and upfront relationship. Jefferson then

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[86] AA to JQA, September 27, 1786, *AFC*, VII, 347.
[87] AA to Cotton Tufts, February 21, 1786, *AFC*, VII, 72.
[88] AA to JQA, March 20, 1786, *AFC*¸VII, 98.
[89] Thomas Jefferson worked with John during the debates and drafting of the Declaration of Independence. He was a member of the joint commission to negotiate peace and commercial treaties with Great Britain following the end of the war. After they succeeded, Jefferson was named the American Minster to France. He developed a close relationship with the Adamses that would be interrupted once Jefferson succeeded John as President of the United States but reconciled after they were both out of political offices. *AFC*, II, 23. See editor's note 2; *AFC*, IV, 164. See editor's note 4.
[90] AA to Thomas Jefferson, June 6, 1785, *AFC*, VI, 172.

initiated a debate concerning the characters of the British versus those of the French (foreshadowing the strong disagreement that would develop between John and Jefferson regarding which country to placate more).[91] Because of this candidness, Abigail went as far as to curse in a letter to Jefferson: "The account is false—if it was not too rough a term for a Lady to use, I would say false as Hell, but I will substitute, one not less expressive and say, false as the English."[92] Abigail's sentence was loaded with an uncommon frankness and even a political comment about the British. Interestingly, she voiced her straightforward opinion even though she admitted using a term "too rough for a Lady." Abigail found ways to work around the dictates of proper female behavior while still getting her point across.

Abigail and Jefferson's relationship went beyond political debate: they asked for advice from and performed favors for one another. Jefferson was unsure whether or not Congress would pay for his housing while in Paris. He asked Abigail her opinion on the best course of action "because I think you know better than Mr. Adams what may be necessary and right for him to do in occasions of this class."[93] Here was an enormous political figure recognizing a woman's ability to understand her financial situation and advise others regarding their own. Even though economy may have fallen under the category of both masculine and feminine duties, Jefferson trusted Abigail's opinion over that of her husband.

The confidence Jefferson and Abigail had in one another led them to essentially trade goods back and forth. They requested certain items that could not be procured in

[91] Thomas Jefferson to AA, June 21, 1785, *AFC*, VI, 177-8.
[92] AA to Thomas Jefferson, October 19, 1785, *AFC*, VI, 437.
[93] Thomas Jefferson to AA, June 21, 1786, *AFC*¸ VI, 180.

their respective locations without much exchange of actual money.[94] Abigail even joked about a more personal exchange: "suppose you give me Miss Jefferson, and in some future day take a Son in lieu of her. I am for Strengthening the federal Union."[95] In reality, Abigail did host one of Jefferson's daughters for a few weeks. Jefferson took the liberty to instruct eight-year-old Mary (known to friends as Polly) to stay with the Adamses in London on her way to meet her father in Paris. He did not, however, obtain consent from the Adamses beforehand, citing that "I knew your goodness too well to scruple giving this direction before I had asked your permission."[96] The freedom with which Abigail and Jefferson addressed one another led to an honest correspondence that would last for decades.

Aside from the politics and pleasure, Abigail was forced to deal once again with a very serious family issue. Nabby, with a short, simple letter, ended her connection with Royall Tyler. The fallout was great. John and Abigail supported their daughter but Tyler proved difficult to get rid of. Tyler boarded with the Cranches, who had distrusted him all along. Cotton Tufts put a lot of effort into recovering John's legal account books, which Abigail had entrusted to Tyler in anticipation of the marriage. Tyler blamed Nabby's friends for turning her against him and threatened to cross the ocean to convince her otherwise. The Adamses later became aware of an illegitimate child he fathered soon after the end of the courtship. Abigail, who had been so quick to approve of Tyler, realized the injustices he committed against her daughter (he had flaunted her letters, refused to forward letters she wrote to her friends, and rarely wrote to her while she was

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[94] AA to Thomas Jefferson, August 12, 1785, Thomas Jefferson to AA, September 25, 1785, *AFC*, VI, 264-5, 391.
[95] AA to Thomas Jefferson, July 23, 1786, *AFC*, VII, 288.
[96] Thomas Jefferson to AA, December 21, 1786, *AFC*, VII, 410.

away) but repeatedly professed that she wished nothing but the best for him. Abigail was convinced that Tyler's actions justified Nabby's decision but she harbored no ill will, as some of the other members of the family had.[97]

Shortly following this episode, William Stephens Smith announced his intention to court Nabby. Like Tyler, Smith went through Abigail to get permission rather than through John. This relationship was more successful and Abigail had to face another new form of separation: she gave her first child away in marriage. Nabby had been Abigail's only steady companion for the past decade and, even though the newlyweds only moved a mile away, the separation was difficult for both women. Nabby soon made John and Abigail grandparents, an experience Abigail enjoyed, yet she worried about her daughter. Even worse than the short distance in London was the fact that Nabby chose to move to Smith's home state of New York upon their return to the United States. [98] The distance would prove hard during the difficult times in Nabby's life, and was compounded by the fact that her marriage did not turn out as happy as she had hoped.

Following the marriage of their daughter, John and Abigail increasingly wished to return home. Little progress could be achieved beyond what John had already accomplished and he questioned the necessity of his continued presence in Europe. After repeated requests for a recall, John and Abigail were finally approved to return home. For John it was to be a sweet return after ten year's absence, and Abigail was eager to see her sons and move into the new home they purchased during their absence. Abigail did not, however, anticipate the quiet domestic retirement that she had always hoped for. She

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[97] AA2 to Royall Tyler, August 11, 1785, AA to Mary Cranch, August 15, 1785, Mary Cranch to AA, December 10, 1785, *AFC*, VI, 262, 276, 487; Cotton Tufts to AA, January 5, 1786, AA to Cotton Tufts, January 10, 1786, Mary Cranch to AA, February 9, 1786, *AFC*, 6, 8, 48.

[98] William Stephens Smith to AA, December 29, 1785, *AFC*, VI, 508; AA to Mary Cranch, July 4, 1786, AA to Mary Cranch, January 20, 1787, *AFC*, VII, 235, 448; Levin, *Abigail Adams*, 252-53.

returned to the United States believing that her husband would "neither be an idle or useless spectator" but instead would "[place] himself upon the theater of his own country."[99] Little did Abigail know, she would be placed in the spotlight alongside her companion and be exposed to the very heart of the American political system. But no matter how John's career affected her life, Abigail forever loyally and stoically stood beside her husband, proclaiming "I asked not my Heart what it could, but what it ought to do."[100]

[99] AA to JQA, 1788. Cited in Jack Shepherd, *The Adams Family Chronicles: Four Generations of Greatness* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1975), 150.
[100] AA to Hannah Quincy Lincoln Storer, February 15, 1778, *AFC*, II, 397.

Chapter Four

"My ambition will extend no further than reigning in the Heart of my Husband"[1]: Abigail in the National Spotlight, 1789-1800

Upon John Adams's election to the first ever United States vice presidential term in April 1789, Abigail was once again left at home. She planned to eventually join her husband in the capital of New York, but had just returned home from visiting Nabby's growing family (where she heard rumors about John's prospects before he was elected) and did not immediately accompany him.[2] Once back in Braintree, Abigail took charge of the domestic affairs of the house, but this did not last for long. Abigail arranged to have the house taken care of once again, and departed for New York only two months after John. It was one year and one day since her return from Europe.

When John arrived in New York and realized that "No Provision No arrangement, has been made for the President or Vice P.," he did not despair of his situation. He wrote optimistically to Abigail because he believed that "You and I however, are the two People in the World the best qualified for this situation. We can conform to our

[1] AA to JA, February 26, 1794 [electronic edition]. *Adams Family Papers: An Electronic Archive.* Massachusetts Historical Society. <http://www.masshist.org/digitaladams> Hereafter cited *AFPe*.
[2] Levin, *Abigail Adams*, 253.

Circumstances."[3] John might have had experience watching his own personal expenses, but it was Abigail who had generally been in charge of the entire household. If John was complimenting anyone in his or her ability to adjust to limited finances, it was his wife. John could board in the homes of fellow politicians when he was by himself but it was Abigail who established and ran their homes. Without her, John would have either continued to live with his friends or else have his own empty, poorly-run house.

Over the course of John's terms in office, the couple traveled back and forth between the changing capitals (New York City, Philadelphia, and finally Washington) and Braintree.[4] Almost always, Abigail visited her daughter along the way in her home outside of New York. Often, Abigail's failing health prevented her from making the trip and she spent several years at home while John continued to travel back and forth. The variety of locations in which Abigail found herself allowed for a range of correspondence over the course of John's twelve years in office, whether with her sisters while she was in the capital, with John while she was at home, and with her scattered children all over the world.

Abigail's new duties as the wife of a high official overwhelmed her. Although she was invited to many dinners while in Europe, she was uncomfortable because of the language barrier and extravagance and avoided such interactions when possible. From the moment she arrived in New York, Abigail faced a barrage of requests for an audience. The sheer amount of time she was required to devote to visits and dinners was a burden upon her health and patience. Custom dictated that elites pay social calls to one

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[3] JA to AA, April 22, 1789, *AFPe*.

[4] Braintree became incorporated as Quincy in 1792 and will be referred to as such when applicable. Stewart Mitchell, ed., *New Letters of Abigail Adams, 1788-1801* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1947), 84. See editor's note 2. Hereafter cited as *NL*.

another; once called upon, one was obliged to return the visit. Always resourceful, Abigail learned to minimize the amount of time she spent meeting with people by making or returning social calls when she knew they would be unavailable.[5] By doing so, she treated people respectfully as was expected of her position but also found time to manage her own affairs. At the same time, Abigail worried that the spotlight and attention would go to her head, and asked her sisters to let her know if she began to treat them differently.[6] Abigail labeled the demands of her lofty position a "splendid misery."[7] Even though she was firmly rooted in her moralistic and virtuous Christian beliefs, she recognized an inherent fallibility in humanity. Abigail herself had experienced moments of weakness throughout her hardships and made sure that she would be checked by those who cared about her.

While George Washington and John Adams were feeling out their new positions, Martha Washington and Abigail Adams were developing an interesting friendship. Martha was a southerner who appears not to have been exposed to the political world and did not feel suited for the public spotlight. She became fascinated by Abigail's knowledge and experience in such situations. Martha even referenced Abigail's taste in fashion when she purchased a watch and chain for her niece.[8] At the same time, Abigail respected Martha for her modesty and plainness, attributes Abigail always hoped to maintain herself.[9] The two wives often appeared in public together and Martha reserved

[5] AA to Mary Cranch, August 9, 1789, *NL*, 18-19.
[6] AA to Mary Cranch, July 12, 1789, *NL*, 14.
[7] AA to Mary Cranch, May 16, 1797, *NL*, 89.
[8] Janet Whitney, *Abigail Adams* (Boston: Little Brown and Company, 1947), 235-36.
[9] AA to Mary Cranch, June 28, 1789, *NL*, 13.

her right hand seat for Abigail, even if President Washington himself had to make someone else relinquish his or her place.[10]

Abigail devoted much of her time outside of visitations dealing with the domestic affairs of her household. Each new capital required a new home, new servants, and new arrangements. Dinners had to be organized, sickness ran rampant, and family members came and went. Abigail was in charge of maintaining affairs back in Braintree as well, through letters to her sister and uncle. She also used her station to try and connect family members with job opportunities, especially those who suffered financial difficulties.[11] Constantly active, Abigail found the time to read what she pleased, stayed informed about politics, and fulfilled her role as caretaker of her family and the vice president's wife. By taking care of the household, Abigail made it possible for John to spend the majority of his time handling governmental affairs.

John often called upon Abigail as a source of support in other ways, even when she stayed behind in Braintree due to incapacitating illnesses. After nearly two decades of national and international political involvement, John's new role as Vice President afforded him what he believed to be less significance than he anticipated. A man of action and steadfast convictions, John lamented his supervisory position to Abigail, complaining, "my Country has in its Wisdom contrived for me, the most insignificant Office that ever the Invention of Man contrived or his Imagination conceived: and as I can do neither good nor Evil, I must be born away by Others and meet the common Fate."[12] Abigail did not share John's sentiments about his office but instead warned of the possibility that someone with a malicious agenda could use the position for mischief.

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[10] Akers, *Abigail Adams*, 118.
[11] AA to Mary Cranch, April 21, 1790, *NL*, 45.
[12] JA to AA, December 19, 1793, *AFPe.*

Someone of John's character, she asserted, was needed to maintain the stability of Congress and watch over the proceedings.[13] Abigail's words proved true, as John's record thirty-one tiebreaking votes helped shape early American politics.[14]

Abigail often woke up early in the morning to spend some time alone. She spent much of this time reading newspapers and government documents and also wrote many letters to friends and family. Even John commented at the devotion Abigail maintained for these activities when he wrote to her during one of their separations, "I want my Talkative Wife… but my Wife, was too studious and addicted to scribbing to talk much to me when she was here."[15] Abigail was too interested in political matters to simply sacrifice expanding her knowledge and understanding because of tea parties. She was a Federalist to the core and her husband's position gave her the opportunity to learn more and expand her political knowledge.

Abigail's letters were the only connection she maintained with most of her loved ones. They served as both an outlet for frustrations and a source of connection to the home she missed. Upon catching John in the act of reading a letter addressed to Abigail from her sister Mary, Abigail reproached her husband and stormed off with the letter.[16] In doing so, she both defended her privacy and chided John for his dishonest actions. The details Abigail shared and the opinions she recorded in her letters—and the responses she received from her sister—took on a diary-like quality, making them too personal even for her husband to read without her permission. This event illustrates the degree of independence that Abigail had developed through her letters and the sensitivity

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[13] AA to JA, December 31, 1793, *AFPe.*
[14] Grant, *John Adams,* 373-74; Mitchell, *NL*, xxxv.
[15] JA to AA, January 1, 1799, *AFPe.*
[16] AA to Mary Cranch, November 15, 1797, *NL*, 110-11.

she felt about her only connection to most of her loved ones throughout her life, including John. Abigail's defense against a husband she did not normally scold showed that the little autonomy she possessed would not be easily violated.

As President Washington announced his intention to step down from his office at the close of his second term, Abigail began to recognize the possibility that her husband might be the General's successor. For all of Abigail's strains in the public life and John's feelings of worthlessness at his position, Abigail believed that Washington was the only man worth continuing to suffer under. Her life was so interconnected with John's actions that she talked as if she herself was the person in office, declaring "I would be second unto no Man but Washington."[17] If John was to spend the next four years in another office, Abigail demanded that it be the presidency or nothing. She also wondered whether she would make a good First Lady and contemplated its implications, writing to John that "I must impose a silence upon myself when I long to talk."[18] On several occasions both abroad and during John's vice presidency, Abigail had understood the prudence of silence in certain situations: she now realized that by becoming the single most visible female figure in the United States, she would have to keep her opinions in check so that her words would not be misconstrued and used against her husband.[19] Her fears proved prophetic, as a private letter she wrote regarding her opinion as to who should be an assistant to the latest Quincy Reverend was made public. Abigail was surprised that "any Gentleman would have had so little delicacy or so small a sense of propriety as to have written a mere vague opinion, and that of a Lady too, to be read in a publick assembly as an authority." She was surprised that, regardless of her social

[17] AA to JA, January 21, 1796, *AFPe.*
[18] AA to JA, February 20, 1796, *AFPe.*
[19] AA to Mary Cranch, January 5, 1790, *NL*, 36.

standing, her opinion was referenced since she was technically just the wife of a politician, and not a politician herself. Even though religion was a large part of women's lives, the appointment to a religious office was a matter of public significance and therefore out of her realm. Abigail was not too worried about the influence her words might have, but still determined to "be upon my guard, & to be very close mouthed."[20] Silence, obviously, did not entail ignorance or apathy for Abigail, as she continued to observe and form her own judgments on relevant issues.

Abigail was not alone in her concerns. John had experienced decades of insufficient government pay and worried that the financial demands of the presidency would outweigh his salary. In response to his hesitation, Abigail took charge and reminded him of his duty and the hopes he previously had for his political career:

> My dearest friend, as you have been called by Providence into the chair of government, you did not accept it without knowing that it had its torments, its trials, its dangers and perplexities. Look steadfastly at them, arm yourself with patience and forbearance and be not dismayed, and may God and the people support you. Having put your hand to the plow, you must not look back.[21]

After decades of making her own sacrifices, Abigail was unwilling to watch her husband falter at the prospect of hardship. Once more, her vision of Republican virtue guided her and her husband. Her unflinching support kept John focused on more important issues while she handled the details of day to day living. Upon learning of John's election while at home in Quincy, Abigail wrote him a sober depiction of the responsibilities that lay ahead. She did not celebrate at his election, but focused on "the important Trusts and Numerous Duties" required of the president and hoped that "you may be enabled to

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[20] AA to Mary Cranch, June 6, 1797, *NL*, 96.
[21] AA to JA, January 29, 1797, *AFPe.*

discharge them with Honour to yourself, with justice and impartiality to your Country."[22] In expressing this hope for her husband, Abigail summarized her concept of a suitable Republican leader and she believed John was just the man for such a position.

As for herself, Abigail's fragile health continued and she suffered greatly during these years. Her children were a major source of stress, as Charles fell in with a bad crowd and slowly degenerated into alcoholism and an early death at the age of thirty, Nabby became increasingly depressed at her husband's aloofness and John Quincy married while in London with little to no involvement from his parents.[23] Regardless of her interests in and concerns about the political scene, Abigail's family remained her foremost priority. In addition to her immediate family, Abigail often took care of some of her grandchildren or arranged to send them to live with one of her sisters. Constantly overburdened and worried for her loved ones, Abigail remained stoic in her sufferings and, as always, played the role required of her.

Never was Abigail's devotion to her family more apparent than in response to the myriad attacks the on Adamses by the country's political journalists. John was heavily criticized as vice president but his presidency brought on a new dimension of personal attacks. John Quincy's Harvard education, experiences in Europe, and exposure to the political world left little doubt as to his intelligence and diplomatic merit. Even George Washington expressed his hopes that John would not neglect promoting John Quincy just because of the criticism John might receive.[24] The younger Adams, Washington believed, was worthy in his own right and had deserved public positions even before his father was president. But for all the pain Abigail felt at the personal attacks, she was in

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[22] AA to JA, February 8, 1797, *AFPe*.
[23] JA to AA, February 4, 1794, *AFPe*; AA to Mary Cranch, October 13, 1797, *NL*, 109-10.
[24] Levin, *Abigail Adams*, 315.

no position to publicly defend her family. She was just as informed and opinionated as many leading men but she was determined to stay within her feminine bounds, especially since she was in the spotlight, and could only pour out her pain to close family and friends.[25] She did, however, find a way to get more positive images heard. Through her family members, Abigail had several articles published in different newspapers that put John's policies in a better light than his critics had.[26] This subversive method of exposure did not have Abigail's name associated with the articles and letters and was the best she could do to set the record straight. Abigail admitted to having "expected to be vilified and abused, with my whole Family when I came into this situation," and convinced herself that "Strictly to addhere to our duty, and keep ourselves unprejudiced" was all they could do.[27]

In spite of the difficulties of public life, Abigail did stay up to date on the political affairs of the country. Abigail displayed the economic awareness she had developed after years of fending for herself when she anticipated that a declaration of war with France in 1798 following the "XYZ Affair"[28] would increase coffee and sugar prices. She promptly bought up large stores of both.[29] When John and Abigail were separated, they often expressed similar sentiments before having received letters from one another about a given subject, a phenomenon Abigail called "the Tellegraph of the Mind."[30] John would send Abigail political documents to peruse without his own comments on the

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[25] Ibid., 334.
[26] Edith B. Gelles, *"First Thoughts": Life and Letters of Abigail Adams* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1998), 147.
[27] AA to Mary Cranch, June 6, 1797, *NL*, 97.
[28] In 1797 John Adams sent three envoys to France who were told by three agents of the French minister Talleyrand—known as Misters X, Y and Z—that the only way they would receive an audience with Talleyrand was through a cash bribe. Grant, *John Adams*, 388-89.
[29] Bober, *Abigail Adams*, 187.
[30] AA to JA, February 13, 1795, *AFPe.*

matter, and would ask questions like "What do you make of the Intelligence from France?"[31] He wrote to her more like an old fellow congressional delegate rather than his wife. John recognized how politically competent Abigail was and not only respected that she had her own opinions, but was interested in discussing them.

Morality and virtue were a central focus for Abigail during this period of her life. She witnessed the actions of her countrymen both in how they treated her family and how they represented their country in peacetime. Abigail criticized longtime friends James and Mercy Otis Warren for conduct that Abigail considered a violation of the republican virtues to which her own family aspired. Whereas Abigail was always willing to sacrifice the men of her family for her country, Mercy had not given up her own.[32] At the same time, the Warrens wrote that they expected certain "patronage" now that John was in a position of power.[33] This latest complaint built upon a prior comment Abigail made while still in Europe, in which she denounced James Warren for repeatedly turning down government positions and then complaining when he could not find one.[34] This lack of a sense of duty to their country and excessive pride at what they believed they deserved were worth Abigail's contempt. The Adamses had not chosen which assignments to take and which to turn down; instead, they answered every call of duty required of them by their country and never demanded any pageantry in return.

Abigail likewise criticized the conduct of Elbridge Gerry following the XYZ Affair. When John initially nominated Gerry as one of the American envoys, Abigail anticipated that others would denounce his choice but she maintained that "he would not

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[31] JA to AA, November 23, 1794, *AFPe.*
[32] Akers, *Abigail Adams*, 114.
[33] AA to Mary Cranch, July 12, 1789, *NL*, 16.
[34] AA to Mary Cranch, May 25, 1786, *AFC*, VII, 199.

have nominated him if he had not thought him an honest Man and a Friend to his Country, who will neither be deceived nor warped."[35] Abigail expressed her hope that Gerry would accept the nomination because she likewise believed in his merit. Of the three American envoys sent to Paris, Gerry was the only one who refused to leave after the insult of the XYZ Affair. Abigail believed that all three of the envoys should have known to leave right away and accused Gerry of obstinacy.[36] Gerry was under the impression that if he left France, it would lead to certain war with the United States. Abigail knew that Gerry "means the Good of his Country, he means the Peace of it, but… it must not be purchased by national disgrace & dishonour."[37] Regardless of his intentions, Abigail believed that Gerry's actions made him "a ruind Man" and bewailed the rumors and lies spread within the United States because of the uncertainty of the outcome of the incident.

Much of John's presidency was devoted to what became known as the Quasi-War with France.[38] Amidst all the debates about whether or not to officially declare war, Abigail expressed reservations about the French Revolution because she believed it promoted vice, anarchy, and the end of Christian values.[39] For a woman who justified the American struggle in terms of morality, virtue and honor, the bloodiness and lawlessness in France were a breakdown of those exact principles. She worried that such

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[35] AA to Mary Cranch, June 23, 1797, *NL*, 99.
[36] AA to Mary Cranch, June 4, 1798, *NL*, 186.
[37] AA to Mary Cranch, June 13, 1798, *NL*, 192.
[38] Since American independence, the United States did little in the way of maintaining their unending alliance with France that was stipulated in the Treaty of Alliance (1778). American neutrality during the war between Britain and France starting in 1793 (part of the French Revolutionary Wars) and the signing of a commercial treaty with Britain, known as Jay's Treaty (1795), without French approval led France to seize American merchant ships en route to Britain. The Quasi-War was a series of naval engagements between American and French ships lasting from 1798-1800 and ended with the Convention of Mortefontaine, with which John Adams alienated his fellow Federalists who wanted war rather than peace. This is largely believed to be the reason he was not re-elected. Mitchell, *NL*, xxxvi-xxxviii.
[39] Whitney, *Abigail Adams*, 279.

chaos would spread to the United States at a moment when stability and unity were crucial and already wavering. She lamented that "it is difficult to make the people see their danger, untill it is at their doors."[40] In the meantime, the people only hindered her husband's attempts to protect the country by blindly criticizing his actions.

Unlike John's attempt to maintain neutrality, Abigail privately supported the idea of war with France. She believed that the moral threat to America justified defensive preparations and she passionately spoke against France's actions, claiming "we did not break from the shackles of our parent, to become slaves of our sister."[41] Abigail initially sympathized with the French Revolution because it mirrored the efforts of her own country, but she was ready to protect her home from the spread of turmoil taking place in France, even if it meant outright war.[42] Regardless of her own understanding of the situation and fears for her country, she stood behind her husband in his attempts to maintain peace and never publicly questioned his actions.

The issues of slavery and racism once again came to Abigail's attention during this period. During one of their separations, Abigail recounted an event in a letter to John that she claimed "serve to shew how little founded in nature the so much boasted principle of Liberty and equality is." Abigail allowed James, a young black servant of hers, to attend an evening school at his request. She received complaints not because of James's behavior, but because the other boys "did not chuse to go to School with a Black Boy." Abigail used her rhetoric to point out the inconsistencies in the accusers' behavior, saying that the other boys did not object to James's presence at dances or at church services. She complained to John that the accusers were "attacking the principle of

[40] AA to Mary Cranch, March 27, 1798, *NL*, 148.
[41] Akers, *Abigail Adams*, 154.
[42] Whitney, *Abigail Adams*, 279.

Liberty and equality upon the only Ground upon which it ought to be supported, an equality of Rights. The Boy is a Freeman as much as any of the young Men, and merely because his Face is Black, is he to be denied instruction?"[43] Likewise, Abigail's major complaint with the final move of the nation's capital to Washington was that slavery still existed there. She overlooked the immediate shortcomings of the city because it was still in the process of being built, but she observed that the whites who lived in a slave society were intellectually degraded by the institution even more than the slaves themselves were.[44] The juxtaposition of the capital of a nation touting republican principles and such a demeaning institution was difficult for Abigail to observe.

Abigail continually questioned this selective concept of equality she witnessed throughout her country, but she was not entirely color-blind. During her stay in New York during John's first term as Vice President, Abigail complained about the difficulty of finding sober servants in general, but more specifically pointed out that, "as to the Negroes, I am most sincerely sick of them."[45] Even though her frustration extended to all servants, Abigail still referenced a particular group based on their race. Whereas she did not believe "Freedmen" were any less worthy of liberty and equality than everyone else, she still used general racial distinctions. On the other hand, once Abigail was more settled in, she claimed that "the chief of the servants here who are good for any thing are Negroes who are slaves" and simultaneously criticized white servants, saying they "are

[43] AA to JA, February 13, 1797, *AFPe.*
[44] AA to Mary Cranch, November 21, 1800, *NL*, 257.
Akers, *Abigail Adams*, 173.
[45] AA to Mary Cranch, August 9, 1789, *NL*, 20.

all Foreigners and chiefly vagabonds."[46] For her, race was not a predetermination of character, but instead she judged people based on their merit.

The signing of a treaty between the Creek nation and the United States afforded Abigail her first interactions with Native Americans. She called them "Creek savages" but did not label them such in a malicious manner; instead, she asserted that "they behave with much civility" and they were "fine looking Men, placid countenances & fine shape." This is another testament to Abigail's consciousness of race but also her willingness to appreciate people in spite of stereotypes. She described a ceremony the Creeks held in celebration of the treaty, which included dancing around a bonfire "like so many spirits hooping, singing, yelling, and expressing their pleasure and satisfaction in the true savage stile." One of the Creek Chiefs honorarily named Abigail "Mammea," the definition of which eluded her. This gesture, however, shows that Abigail treated the Creeks with respect despite any misgivings she may have had about their culture and was worthy of the honor conferred upon her. Overall Abigail expressed a positive impression of the Creeks and recognized that they could be intelligent and civil just like anyone else in a time when many of her fellow countrymen cared little for the Native Americans who hindered westward expansion.

Despite the prejudices Abigail might have held, racial or not, she believed that people were inherently equal in their humanity. They may not have been equally well-read in philosophy, well-versed in politics, or even equally virtuous, but Abigail believed that all people experienced the same difficulties in life. This was never clearer to her than when she sat atop the political world beside her husband. She realized that she suffered the same hardships she always had, and the common people of American faced

[46] AA to Mary Cranch, April 28, 1790, *NL*, 48.

the same adversity. Abigail shared these feelings with her sister following one of Nabby's periods of loneliness raising young children without the help of her husband or mother: "No station in Life was ever designd by Providence to be free from trouble and anxiety. The portion I believe is much more equally distributed than we imagine."[47] It was a sentiment Abigail echoed several times throughout John's terms of office and it humbled her, connecting her to the rest of the world through the common difficulties of life.

In such difficult times for her family, Abigail supervised her children and tried to make sure they stayed on a virtuous path in life. Long before Charles's death in December 1800, Abigail had heard he was under the influence of bad crowds at Harvard and she forced him to accompany her to New York, even at the cost of missing his own commencement.[48] When the new environment proved ineffectual after a decade and John learned of the degree of Charles's decline, the President turned his back on his son. John lamented the heartache children gave their parents and considered George Washington lucky for having no children, but Abigail scolded John for his claim, saying "I do not consider G.W. at all a happier Man because he has not Children. If he has none to give him pain, he has none to give him pleasure."[49] Abigail attempted to maintain faith in Charles but echoed John's sentiments upon receiving news of her son's death, referring to him as "a poor unhappy child who cannot now add an other pang to those which have peirced my Heart for several years past."[50] Abigail still tried to soften the

[47] AA to Mary Cranch, December12, 1790, *NL*, 67.
[48] Akers, *Abigail Adams*, 117-18.
[49] AA to JA, January 12, 1799, *AFPe.*
[50] AA to Mary Cranch, December 8, 1800, *NL*, 261.

severity of the negative charges made toward Charles, as she supported her son even in death.

Marriage was another important issue during Abigail's time at the capitals. Nabby was miserable because of her absent and indebted husband, but Abigail tried to emotionally support her daughter through her hardships. Abigail never suggested divorce or any such taboo undertaking; she instead hoped that Nabby would remain strong in her hardships and do what "may prove beneficial to the whole."[51] Abigail was also relieved that Nabby did not bring her difficulties upon herself. She was simply a woman who found herself in a bad marriage and had no choice but to accept her lot.[52] Abigail expressed her true beliefs about marriage to her son John Quincy when she heard of his engagement. She warned him to choose his wife carefully because marriage was "the most important [action] of your life."[53] For all of his involvement in international politics and his impressive education, Abigail still considered marriage the most important part of John Quincy's life. Her words proved prophetic, since her son's marriage was difficult from the very beginning and would remain so until his death.[54] Abigail hoped her children would share her luck in their lifelong commitments but once it was clear that they had not, social standards about marriage still prevailed and she advised her children to make the most of their unfortunate situations.

Even though Abigail continued to support women's traditional roles, she had her own way of maintaining their importance. Women were supportive figures for men, but she asserted that "I will never consent to have our sex considered in an inferior point of

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[51] AA to Mary Cranch, October 31, 1797, *NL*, 109.
[52] AA to Mary Cranch, October 22, 1797, *NL*, 109.
[53] Levin, *Abigail Adams*, 323.
[54] Ibid., 330.

light." Instead, she demanded "Let each planet shine in their own orbit. God and nature designed it so—if man is Lord, woman is Lordess."[55] Abigail knew how important her role was in allowing John to act according to his duty and honor. He could not have done so without her. He could not have supported his family without Abigail's prudence and economy throughout the years, nor could he have focused on his political duties if she was not taking care of the household and family. Even though Abigail always acknowledged the restrictions put upon her sex—to which she adhered more during John's vice presidencies and presidency than ever before—she refused to believe that what she did, what she sacrificed, was less than what men did. Abigail demanded recognition of the equal importance of women's roles, even if their roles were not the same as men's.

John confided in his wife about issues of policy. How much influence she had is difficult to determine but it is clear she was made aware of situations sometimes before Congress.[56] Edith B. Gelles asserts that, even though she was not a policymaker, Abigail's discussions with John likely helped him at least focus his thoughts and make his decisions during his presidency.[57] Some historians claim that third person accounts of Abigail's influence on John were likely exaggerated, but it is important that her contemporaries saw her as such an influential person.[58] She did not act as such, however, in a public manner, but instead her opinions were important to John because she was his wife. John privately confided in his wife and she provided him with the strength and stability he needed in order to run the country.

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[55] Akers, *Abigail Adams*, 143.
[56] Gelles, *"First Thoughts,"* 143.
[57] Ibid., 154.
[58] Mitchell, *NL*, xxviii.

Abigail's strength as an individual woman was apparent during her final return to Quincy at the end of John's service to his country. Eager to return home, Abigail went on ahead of John, accompanied by her niece, Louisa. Louisa feared the awful road conditions and the fact that the two women traveled without a male companion. Abigail agreed that she would have preferred to travel with a man, but years of solitude made her "accustomed to get through many a trying scene and combat many difficulties alone."[59] Abigail did not snub social customs by traveling alone; instead, she was used to having little help or companionship and became strong enough to handle such details without much assistance. This was quite a change from the young Abigail who lamented being on her own and often asked John for help and advice through letters. She was now her own mature woman capable of living and making decisions by herself without a second thought.

The United States government recognized John's and Abigail's sacrifices over the years and duly elected John to three terms in high office. Even though criticisms and hardships plagued these twelve years, Abigail exhibited the qualities of a supportive wife, nurturing mother, and steadfast republican. She was grateful that the nation valued John's experience and convictions and never hesitated to follow him wherever his career led. At times she was forced to watch her own words for fear that she would damage her husband's reputation and therefore hinder his work. In everything, Abigail thought of her family first and her nation a close second. The two were intertwined from the first stirrings of the American Revolution and would remain so for generations to come. But in all of this, Abigail's greatest aspiration was to be the best wife she could to a husband

[59] Levin, *Abigail Adams*, 390.

she loved and respected, declaring "My ambition will extend no further than reigning in the Heart of my Husband. That is my Throne and there I aspire to be absolute."[60]

[60] AA to JA, February 26, 1794, *AFPe.*

Epilogue

Home in Quincy, John and Abigail finally found the quiet domestic life they had awaited for the past three decades. They did not, however, abandon their interests in public or governmental matters. In Abigail's case, this was most evident through her short correspondence with then-President Thomas Jefferson in 1804. The circumstances surrounding this exchange, however, provide much more insight into Abigail's personality during her post-public life and the values she still held.

While John and Jefferson had worked together on the Declaration of Independence and their diplomatic missions abroad with the shared goal of preparing the best future for their country, the specific beliefs as to how exactly to achieve that goal had always differed between the two. John (and Abigail) advocated a strong central government in which the few represented the interests of the many. Republican ideals put the power of the nation into the hands of the people, based on the belief that their virtue and morality would motivate their actions. The Adamses, though subscribing to this theory, believed that in reality the masses were not trustworthy. Jefferson defended the power of the states and individual rights, and he believed that the yeoman farmer could be the virtuous backbone of the country if he remained uncorrupted by capitalistic

trade.[1] Jefferson acknowledged and respected this difference of opinion: "Both our political parties… agree conscientiously in the same object, the public good: but they differ essentially in what they deem the means of promoting that good… Which is right, time and experience will prove."[2] Despite their political disagreements, the families had always respected each other both personally and professionally. They did not attack one another in their differences of opinion, but instead had mature discussions about the nation's future.

The actual falling out between the Adamses and Jefferson occurred after the latter assumed the presidency. The old friends remained civil throughout the election but when Jefferson took office in the spring of 1801, a series of events created hard feelings on both sides. Even though the Adamses and Jefferson always disagreed on political rhetoric, it was the actual implementation of party-favoring policies that caused the ultimate rift. Jefferson complained about John's "midnight appointments," in which Adams placed Federalists in positions of power on the eve of the Democratic-Republican's presidency. On the other hand, the Adamses believed that Jefferson's renunciation of the Sedition Act and snub of John Quincy were personal attacks.[3] Discussing theories as foreign diplomats was one thing, but when Jefferson perceived that John tried to sabotage his presidency before it even began and John thought Jefferson dismissed the policies he had worked for four years to establish, both men felt personally wronged.

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[1] Gordon S. Wood, *The Radicalism of the American Revolution* (New York: Vintage Books, 1993), 252.
[2] Thomas Jefferson to AA, September 11, 1804, *The Adams-Jefferson Letters: The Complete Correspondence Between Thomas Jefferson and Abigail and John Adams*, ed. Lester J.Cappon, 2 vols. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1959) I, 280. Cited hereafter *AJL*.
[3] Levin, *Abigail Adams*, 414-17.

Abigail initiated her exchange with Jefferson due to personal tragedy: the latter's daughter had passed away. Mary Jefferson Eppes had stayed with the Adamses for a short period in 1786 in London on her way to meet her father in Paris. Abigail never forgot her attachment to the young girl and mourned her premature death during childbirth. Abigail's personal connection to the Jefferson family temporarily overshadowed the political differences and disputes between the former and sitting presidents that had ended their friendship three and a half years before, because even though "reasons of various kinds withheld my pen," "the powerfull feelings of my heart, have burst through the restraint..."[4] Abigail's first letter hinted at the estrangement but stayed focused on her condolences for Jefferson's loss. She consciously avoided political discussion and did not encourage further conversation.[5]

Jefferson, recalling the honesty of the friendship that had existed between Abigail and himself in Europe, took the opportunity to address some of the issues that had ended the relationship. On both sides of the correspondence, the memory of a close personal friendship justified the political discussions that followed. Jefferson maintained that he still regarded the Adamses with the same esteem he always held for them and that the only personal injury he ever felt at the hands of John was the "midnight appointments," in which John had selected what Jefferson called "my most ardent political enemies" for district judgeships right before the presidency changed between them. By addressing the rift between himself and the Adamses, Jefferson "opened myself to you without reserve, which I have long wished an opportunity of doing; and, without knowing how it will be

[4] Cappon, *AJL*, I, 265.
[5] AA to Thomas Jefferson, May 20, 1804, *AJL*, I, 268-9.

recieved, I feel relief from being unbosomed."[6] It was, therefore, Jefferson who initiated the political dialogue that would allow Abigail to question and dispute the sitting President of the United States.

It was in this context that Abigail once again took up her pen. Seeing the opportunity to discuss the wrongs she felt Jefferson committed against her family, she continued her correspondence without the knowledge or approval of her husband. In this sense, Abigail's actions were bold but the contents of her letters, given the circumstances, were not quite as remarkable. She did not address Jefferson as President; instead, she wrote to him "with the freedom and unreserve of former Friendship," which allowed the candidness that Abigail pursued.[7] She discussed her husband's and her own political beliefs and understanding of the United States Constitution but did so in a personal manner, as they had done a decade earlier between London and Paris. Abigail first defended John from the accusation Jefferson made against him for his last minute appointments, even twisting her memory of the event to absolve him of inflicting deliberate injury. Abigail claimed that Jefferson's election had not been determined at the time of the appointments when, in fact, it had been.

Abigail then turned the tables on Jefferson, first assuring him that her anger had not come out of jealousy that he had won the presidency over John. Instead, Abigail chided Jefferson for pardoning James Thomas Callender[8] despite his conviction under the Sedition Act. She felt that this was an affront to John, since Callender had been jailed for

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[6] Thomas Jefferson to AA, Jun 13, 1804, *AJL*, I, 270-1.
[7] AA to Thomas Jefferson, August 18, 1804, *AJL*, I, 278.
[8] James Thomas Callender immigrated to the United States and criticized Federalist leaders. In June 1800, Callender was convicted for his libel against John Adams but Thomas Jefferson pardoned him in 1801. He later did the same to the Republican administration and perpetuated scandalous stories of Jefferson. See *AJL*, I, 273, note 21 and 274, note 23.

slandering Federalist leaders. Abigail had long expressed her belief in the need of a "Sedition Bill" because, even though people deserved the freedom to truthfully criticize, she did not believe malicious lies should be allowed.[9] Some degree of virtue was needed to maintain the stability of the country. Jefferson's support and reported praise of Callender, Abigail claimed, undermined both John's authority and personal character. Whether or not Abigail hoped for another response from Jefferson, she proclaimed her forgiveness for his actions "in the true spirit of christian Charity… as I hope to be forgiven." Taking the high ground, Abigail continued to deny any wrongdoing against him and forgave him, just as God would. She did not try to wipe the slate clean and start afresh their friendship, but instead wanted to point out the problems she had with Jefferson, insisting that she "[bore] no malice" toward him.[10]

Jefferson continued to explain his actions with what appeared to be the hope of mending their friendship. He reinforced Abigail's claim that the political differences of the concerned parties were not under attack: "I tolerate with the utmost latitude the right of others to differ from me in opinion without imputing to them criminality."[11] Instead the correspondents focused on specific incidents in which each believed he or she received personal injury. Whereas Abigail wrote in a negative style, such as noting she was *not* angry at Jefferson for his election and John did *not* try to sabotage Jefferson's presidency, Jefferson himself continually praised the Adamses and made "assurances of my continued wishes for the health and happiness of yourself and Mr. Adams." Abigail focused on defending the honor of her family while Jefferson aimed at reconciliation.

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[9] AA to Mary Cranch, April 26, 1798, *NL*, 165.
[10] AA to Thomas Jefferson, July 1, 1804, *AJL*, I, 271-4.
[11] Thomas Jefferson to AA, September 11, 1804, *AJL*, I, 280.

Jefferson ended his letter much as he had his European letters to Abigail, while she abruptly ended hers without any well-wishing.

Jefferson claimed that he did not pardon Callender as an affront to John, but rather pardoned everyone convicted under the Sedition Act because he believed the law to be unconstitutional.[12] Abigail, mustering all the political rhetoric she possessed, argued that "I have understood that the power which makes a Law, is alone competent to the repeal. If a Chief Majestrate can by his will annul a Law, where is the difference between a republican, and a despotic Government?"[13] She challenged his understanding of the very structure of the government he headed. To this, Jefferson lectured Abigail about the separation of powers between the governmental branches and asserted it was in his power to nullify the implementation of any law he believed unconstitutional, as a check upon the judicial branch.[14] Abigail questioned Jefferson's belief in the unconstitutionality of the Sedition law, stating "I cannot agree… that the constitution ever meant to withhold from the National Government the power of self defense." She also took a moralistic approach, claiming that she did not believe that it should be "considered an infringement of the Liberty of the press, to punish the licentiousness of it."[15] Jefferson's lack of religious fervor likely prevented him from sympathizing with Abigail's last argument, but he was not permitted a rebuttal.

Another issue Abigail raised against Jefferson was his dismissal of John Quincy from the latter's appointment as Commissioner of Bankruptcy in Massachusetts.[16] Surprised by the accusation, Jefferson insisted he was not aware that John Quincy was

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[12] Thomas Jefferson to AA, July 22, 1804, *AJL*, I, 275.
[13] AA to Thomas Jefferson, August 18, 1804, *AJL*, I, 276.
[14] Thomas Jefferson to AA, September 11, 1804, *AJL*, I, 279.
[15] AA to Thomas Jefferson, October 25, 1804, *AJL*, I, 281-2.
[16] AA to Thomas Jefferson, August 18, 1804, *AJL*, I, 277.

one of the officials he excused. He maintained, instead, that the offices were not meant to be permanent and the displayed federal partiality of the commissioners led the legislature to transfer the power to the president.[17] Abigail happily accepted Jefferson's explanation and resumed the friendly tone with which she once wrote him. Although she did not agree with Jefferson's political beliefs, Abigail appeared to understand that he never acted maliciously against her family. With this confirmation, Abigail ended her correspondence with Jefferson, assuring him that "no one will more rejoice in your success than Abigail Adams."[18] Even though Abigail had dissolved the major conflicts between the Adams and Jefferson families, it was not her place to make a reconciliation and her allegiance was to her husband: she could not in good conscience continue to write to Jefferson.

Abigail Adams was supposed to have a normal, eighteenth-century life. But from her birth, she continually experienced both subtle and drastic differences that ultimately made her life unique. What was essentially a typical girl's childhood enabled Abigail to marry a capable lawyer and public figure who would take her places she never imagined. Coming from a line of women who were used to marrying prominent men such as John Adams, Abigail was raised to be a traditional female aid and companion to her husband, no matter what his business called for him to do.

The terminology used to describe the importance of marriage changed with the coming of the American Revolution, although the actual wifely duties remained nearly the same. In both John's work-related absences and his early political involvement in the revolution, Abigail took care of the house, the farm, various business activities, and

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[17] Thomas Jefferson to AA, September 11, 1804, *AJL*, I, 278-80.
[18] AA to Thomas Jefferson, October 25, 1804, *AJL*, I, 280-2.

raised her children. Rather than just being a dutiful wife, however, she became a Republican Wife, a politicization of existing women's roles that linked them to a realm in which they had not previously been allowed. Abigail was prepared to sacrifice some time with her husband if he had remained a lawyer, but the sacrifice she made because of the Revolution was unprecedented. Her duty was still to her family but it now served as the means by which she could be an active citizen. The Revolution did not change social roles for women, but it did place new value on women's efforts.

Abigail's close relationship with John and his experiences in politics allowed her to develop her own political rhetoric but also to see more of the world than she had been exposed to. This pulled her out of her comfortable New England home but also brought her to believe that the masses were not virtuous enough to govern themselves and it was her husband's duty to act in their best interest. It was her duty, in turn, to make sure John stayed on the right path. In addition, Abigail had to raise her children so that they would be ready to take the place of founding fathers and perpetuate the principles of republicanism. All the while, Abigail's personal understanding of the new government grew to the point where she comfortably addressed politicians about issues typically reserved for men.

The 1804 correspondence between Abigail Adams and Thomas Jefferson revealed the former's firm belief in the virtues and morals by which she justified the American Revolution. Although she appeared to have challenged the sitting president beyond her naturally prescribed bounds as a woman, in reality Abigail was simply addressing the wrongs she believed she suffered at the hands of an old friend and used the political knowledge she developed over the course of her life to back up her arguments. Abigail's

background and connection to such integral men of the Revolution and early years of the nation gave her a unique opportunity to expand her intellectual grasp of the period to her own satisfaction, but to the end she did not cross beyond her territory as a woman. Likely suffering from the guilt of hiding her correspondence with Jefferson from her husband, Abigail revealed the content of the letters to John almost a month after she wrote her final letter. Abigail might have hoped that she could mend the rift between John and Jefferson, but the former simply wrote "I have no remarks to make upon [the correspondence] at this time and in this place."[19] Abigail's justification to Jefferson for not initially showing her letters to John was that "Faithfull are the wounds of a Friend," and as she suspected, her husband was not ready to forgive his old friend.[20]

The foremost duty in Abigail's life, according to both social precepts and the demands of her country, was her family's wellbeing. She strove to fulfill her responsibilities no matter what was required of her, whether sacrificing the better part of her marriage, handling the business of the farm or defending her husband's honor to a leading political figure. In the process, Abigail made the most of her situation and developed her own set of beliefs and values, sometimes independently of her husband. She was not radical, nor was she common. Abigail Adams was a product of both her genes and her environment; she was her mother's daughter, her husband's wife, her children's mother, and her nation's citizen.

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[19] JA postscript to AA to Thomas Jefferson, October 25, 1804, *AJL*, I, 282.
[20] AA to Thomas Jefferson, July 1, 1804, *AJL*, I, 274.

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